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# COLLEGE ENGLISH

Volume 16

MAY 1955

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## A Fable: The Novel as Myth

DAYTON KOHLER

*The salvation of the world is in man's suffering.*—REQUIEM FOR A NUN

WHILE the materials and techniques of fiction seem capable of almost endless variation, novelists themselves fall roughly into one or the other of two divisions: those who from a social point of view reflect the world around them—e.g., Jane Austen, Flaubert, Trollope, Tolstoy; and those with the rare ability to project in their books a wholly personal vision of experience—e.g., Dickens, Melville, Dostoevsky. In the works of the second group there is always an air of the imaginative and fabulous which transforms everyday reality into something odd or new. Theirs is the way of exaggeration, fantasy, symbol, and myth; and acceptance of their art waits until we can accustom our own vision to a picture of the world as they see it.

William Faulkner, recipient of the Nobel Prize in 1950, shares with these older fabulists the power to impose his

tragic vision on the nature and condition of man. Possibly for this reason we give to his novels the closer scrutiny demanded by complex literary works which are capable of communicating before they are fully understood. *A Fable*, winner of the 1955 National Book Award for fiction, is no exception in the Faulkner canon. His novels increasingly become subjects for serious criticism here and abroad. In fact, there is some evidence that Europeans often show more appreciative understanding of his novels than is displayed by readers at home.

The reason is not hard to find. Faulkner's handling of time and place is seldom limited to the factual or purely local. The Englishman or the European, as David Daiches has pointed out, may be moved to explore the Yoknapatawpha world because of the rich and strange surfaces he finds there. Within it, however, the deeper meanings of Faulkner's work, issues drawn from the history, economy, sociology, and morality of the region, offer little difficulty to readers in countries where landlord and tenant, manor and village, conqueror and conquered, have lived in uneasy proximity with each other for centuries.

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Dayton Kohler is a professor of English at Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Since 1938 he has contributed frequently to our series of leading articles on contemporary writers, usually dealing with Southerners.

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In *A Fable*, Faulkner has tried to achieve universality of a different order. Here he has taken a single event, the mutiny of a French regiment on the western front in May, 1918, and against this wartime background he has written a symbolic and deeply moving novel which in essential characterization and narrative detail parallels the story of the Passion and the Crucifixion. The book is not, as some hasty reviewers have concluded, an account of the Second Coming. Nor is it a mere reenactment of Christ's ministry, betrayal, passion, death, and resurrection, for Faulkner presents his material in terms other than those of the superhuman reality set forth in the Synoptic Gospels. His method in this novel is that of myth, the reversion of the modern writer to some story out of ancient memory which explains the origin and nature of things. The current use of myth as a means of ordering confused or incongruous experience is of particular value in this case; it provides a frame of reference for the Faulknerian situation of contemporary conflict and disaster as well as the symbols illustrating man's capacity for faith in a world of violence and greed.

Thematic treatment of the Gospel story is not new so far as Faulkner's fiction is concerned, though criticism was late in detecting the religious half-lights suffusing his world and penetrating some of its murkiest corners. Writing in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* (Summer, 1953), Robert M. Adams was the first to call public attention to Faulkner's systematic use of the Holy Week in the narrative pattern and symbolism of *The Sound and the Fury*. More recently, Carvel Collins has supplied additional information to show how closely this novel conforms in its

time scheme to the Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday of Christ's Passion and Resurrection, complete with such ecumenical details as a talk with a father, a last supper with bread and wine, a symbolic crucifixion, the Harrowing of Hell, an empty tomb.

Faulkner often seems under compulsion to return to themes or symbolic devices he has used before, as if to examine their possibilities in a new light. His absorption in rituals or sanctions, in sacraments, in symbols that embody buried hopes and fears, should have prepared us for his renewed attempt to extract significance from the Passion Week story. When *A Fable* first appeared, some reviewers discussed it as if it were a parody, a sermon, or a Fifth Gospel according to St. William. Readers will be disappointed, however, if they expect to find in it point-by-point correspondence with the New Testament account. Faulkner's total effect is one of moral symbolism, not history or theological interpretation. At the same time the clearly defined chronology and a relatively uncomplicated structure make it one of the most accessible of his books. Careless readers may even find its opening sections indistinguishable from the many novels of protest against war that appeared shortly after World War I, among them Henri Barbusse's *Under Fire* and Jules Romains' *Verdun*.

The time of the story is late May, 1918, shortly after the disastrous German breakthrough on the western front. At dawn, on Monday, a French regiment, ordered to launch a counter-attack, mutinies and refuses to leave the trenches. Under arrest, the troops are returned to headquarters at Chaulnesmont, where the three Allied commanders meet to deal with this emergency.

Because the regiment had been recruited in the district, relatives and friends of the mutineers flock into the town, their peasant bewilderment and grief changing to rage when they learn that a corporal and his squad of twelve men have instigated the mutiny by preaching behind the lines a creed of peace and good will. By Tuesday, except for intermittent firing, the war has come to a halt from the Channel to the Alps.

Like Pontius Pilate, the old French commander-in-chief is compelled to ask the nature of truth and justice when the Corporal and his squad are brought to judgment. The aged Marshal—he resembles General Foch in little except rank—has had a curious history. An orphan born to great wealth and political prestige, he had entered St. Cyr and dedicated himself to his studies with such selfless devotion that a classmate, later to become Quartermaster General of the French forces, saw him as a savior of France, perhaps of mankind. After graduation, having rejected the rank to which his birth entitled him, he had gone to an obscure outpost in the Sahara and there incurred blood-guilt by sacrificing a brutal legionnaire to tribal justice. Later, before resuming his brilliant military career, he had spent some years in a Tibetan monastery.

During his travels, somewhere in Middle Europe, he fathered a son by a woman already married and the mother of two daughters. When the mother died after giving birth to her child in a stable at Christmas, 1885, Marthe, the younger daughter, took charge of the boy and her feeble-minded sister, Marya. Eventually they wandered as far as Beirut, where Marthe met the French farmer whom she married at the end of his military service.

The boy, the thirty-three-year-old

Corporal of *A Fable*, grew up on the farm of his sister and her husband at Vienne-la-pucelle (a name suggesting another savior of France) north of St. Mihiel. At the outbreak of the war he enlisted and won the Médaille Militaire for bravery in action. He also met and married a rehabilitated Marseilles prostitute whom he apparently sent to live with his sister. Meanwhile he and his squad have moved freely from one part of the front to another, their papers always in order, to carry their message of pacifism and brotherhood among the troops of all nations. After the Corporal's arrest hints of the supernatural enter the story when a British colonel identifies him as a soldier named Boggan, killed by a German lancer in 1914, and an American captain declares that he is an American who had died of influenza and been buried at sea from a troop transport in 1917; but their testimony may be laid to human credulity, as in the legends of the British bowmen seen at Mons.

Much that happens before the Corporal's death on Friday—two thieves and murderers are shot at the same time—parallels on different levels the Gospel story. During a last supper, at which the unwashed, illiterate mutineers of the Corporal's squad mix ribald exchanges with their awkward words of grace, a Judas named Polchek is revealed and another soldier, Pierre Bouc, denies his leader twice. From the same supper the Corporal is summoned, not to Gethsemane to pray, but to an interview with the old Marshal, who offers his now acknowledged son wealth and power if he will renounce the martyrdom he has chosen. The Corporal refuses.

Other events of the false armistice week are Faulkner's invention. A Ger-

man general crosses the lines secretly to confer with the Allied commanders on means to end the truce imposed by common soldiers on both sides. David Levine, a young English flight officer, commits suicide because he feels that he has lost his chance for military glory. On Thursday a British battalion puts down its arms and starts across No Man's Land to meet German soldiers emerging from the opposite trenches; a barrage from both sides wipes out English and Germans alike. A British sentry, ex-groom and horse thief, is blasted by shellfire that also maims an English message runner who believes in the Corporal's mission. The old Quartermaster General repudiates the Marshal's belief that human rapacity and folly are incurable. General Gragnon, commander of the mutinous division, is killed in his cell. A French army chaplain also commits suicide in realization that he has failed to follow Christ's teachings.

After his execution the Corporal's body is turned over to his sisters and wife and it is taken back to Vienne-la-pucelle for burial, but when the fighting begins again along the St. Mihiel salient artillery fire destroys his grave. Later, by ironic chance, the body is recovered from an adjoining field. Unidentified, it is placed in the Unknown Soldier's tomb. The old Marshal dies in 1925, and the crippled English Runner breaks up the funeral procession by throwing the Corporal's medal on the Marshal's coffin and shouting that the patriotic slogans which glorify war are the epitaphs of man. Rescued from mob violence, he is comforted by the sickly, aged Quartermaster General.

This bare summary may serve its purpose in pointing out parallels and differences between *A Fable* and the New Testament account, but it does

little justice to Faulkner's novel. As his readers know, the important thing in his fiction is never the story itself but meanings to be drawn from a closely knit matrix of plot and style. A restless experimenter, he has tried in each book to find the form appropriate to his vision and material. *A Fable*, which is neither fable nor, strictly speaking, allegory, is an example of the totally planned novel in which events and characters take on added stature because we see them in relation to some familiar story born out of the collective human consciousness and true to fundamental problems of the troubled human condition.

That is to say, what is reported outwardly in terms of action and what is metaphorically suggested by imagery and symbolism are so joined that the world of the novel becomes an image of the larger public world as well. We read a story of a Corporal and those involved in the implications of his mission, but we also read a chapter from the moral and spiritual history of man.

Because *A Fable* involves its readers in issues greater than those unfolded on the temporal or causal level of action, it is necessary to get our proper bearings if we are to understand Faulkner's purpose and the nature of his achievement. Perhaps the best approach to the novel is through myth, a concept now popular in critical theory and literary practice. Faced by the endless catalogues of science and the accretions of history, the modern writer resorts to myths in order to bring the timeless and the universal into the time-controlled, space-limited present. Viewed in this light, the myth is more than a pleasing fantasy.

For the modern writer, myth provides form as well as substance. Writing of myth as a way of achieving lit-

erary discipline, Mark Schorer has defined it as "a large controlling image . . . which gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life, that is to say, which has organizing value for experience." Thomas Mann, in an essay on Freud, has written that "life in the myth, life, so to speak, in quotation, is a kind of celebration, in that it is a making present of the past, it becomes a religious act, the performance by a celebrant of a prescribed procedure; it becomes a feast. For a feast is an anniversary, a renewal of the past in the present."

If we substitute Faulkner's own term *pageant-rite* for the word *feast* in the preceding passage, we have the clue to his treatment of myth in *A Fable*. Myth is the spoken part of ritual, and ritual itself is the recurrent act which symbolizes whatever is timeless or cyclic in human experience. One of the conditions of ritual, however, is that it cannot reproduce the initial circumstances or actual mystery of the deed; its function is symbolic. This point is important. In *A Fable*, Faulkner does not attempt to retell the story of the Crucifixion in a modern setting; his Corporal is not Christ but a man willing to assume the risks of his humanity by living in imitation of Christ's teachings, without a promise of future glory through his sacrifice. Faulkner's treatment of Hebraic-Christian myth is like Joyce's use of the Homeric story in *Ulysses* and Mann's adaptation of Faustian legend in *Doctor Faustus*. Through myth he has extended the scope of his novel, retained symbolic hints of the original mystery, and found a principle of structure which the reviewers apparently passed over without notice.

A few critics have commented on the static effect of *A Fable* but without

exploring the matter further; they give the impression that the novel is without dramatic structure because Faulkner was unable to bring his episodes into coherent pattern. The exact opposite is the case. The design of the novel arises naturally from the idea of myth as a means of bringing the past into the present. In *A Fable* we watch a backward and a forward flow of time. Just as an area of estuarial calm exists when a river current meets the equal force of an incoming tide and both are held in balance, neither rising nor falling, so in this novel myth creates the "controlling image" and sets up tensions by permitting a time flow of meaning out of the past against the current of events moving into the past. The action of *A Fable* moves into an area where the realistic present impinges on the mythic past. There it is held suspended while the central situation, the mutiny and its aftermath, is reflected from different angles by the characters involved. The situation remains static. It is our understanding of Faulkner's people and of symbolic meanings that deepens.

The Corporal who stands at the center of the situation is a character drawn with grave economy and concentration. He remains a shadowy enigmatic figure, but we still recognize him as the Faulkner hero who moves in silence, as if taking part in some ritual to which he is dedicated without understanding its mystery. When he ceases to act, the witnesses take over to record and interpret. We see him for the first time when he and his squad are returned to Chaulnesmont under guard. Confronting the angry mob, he shows "a face merely interested, attentive, and calm, with something else in it which none of the others had: a comprehension, understanding, utterly free of

compassion, as if he had already anticipated without censure or pity the uproar which rose and paced and followed the lorry as it sped on." We see him again with his squad at the last supper from which he goes to his scene with the old Marshal on a hill overlooking the town. In the meantime, however, most of his story has come to us by flashbacks or by impressions strained through the sensibilities of other characters. From these accounts we learn that he is a simple peasant, a good farmer, a man with the power to move other men, though his words during his wanderings behind the lines are never reported. Therefore we are prepared for his calm bearing and compassionate speech during the interview with his father. To the Generalissimo's argument that man is not worth dying for, he replies, "There are still ten," thinking of those left in the squad that had trusted and followed him. When the old Marshal begins, "Because man and his folly—" the Corporal adds proudly, "Will endure." Believing in humility and pity and sufferance, he chooses death, the only gift he can accept from the earthly father. The coil of barbed wire against which he falls at his execution is perhaps more reminiscent of the concentration camp of the modern state than of the crown of thorns. He is not the last Christian, or the first, to be martyred by man's inhumanity to man.

The old Marshal set in opposition to the Corporal is the book's greatest triumph as well as its greatest failure. There is about him an air of mortal sadness, pride, and tragic grandeur. Born to the power of wealth and position, he is a prince of the modern world. Having known the world, he has come to believe, like the Preacher in *Ecclesiastes*, in the vanity of all things human.

In the interview on the lonely hill he speaks with the voice of mundane wisdom and authority, for as he says to the Corporal, "We are two articulations, self-elected possibly . . . anyway postulated, not so much to defend as to test two inimical conditions. . . . I champion of this mundane earth which, whether I like it or not, is . . . you champion of an esoteric realm of man's baseless hope and his infinite capacity —no: passion—for unfact."

His contention is that man, because of his "triumphant and ineradicable folly, his deathless passion for being led, mystified, deceived," will prevail over all disaster and change. After the son has rejected all offers of liberty, earthly power, and life, the old Marshal makes his proudest boast: "I don't fear man. I do better: I respect and admire him. And pride: I am ten times prouder of that immortality which he does possess than ever he of that heavenly one of his delusion."

But this character is a failure because he does not lend himself to any single or clearly defined interpretation. The fact that the Corporal says, "Good-bye, Father," as he and the old Marshal part at the gate of the prison compound has caused some reviewers to identify the Generalissimo with the harsh God of the Old Testament. The passage just quoted would seem to refute this view. It is significant, perhaps, that the old Marshal, General Gragnon, and the Sentry-Groom are all orphans—cut off, that is, from knowledge of the father. The three make symbolic quests into the desert or to the mountain, but in each case no vision is given them. They must endure their human condition without divine intercession or aid. Seen in this way, the old Marshal stands for man still earthbound by the limitations of his own dual nature.

Another protagonist-antagonist relationship develops between the Generalissimo and the sickly Quartermaster General. Believing that the Marshal as a young man had renounced the world, the Quartermaster General has looked on him as a leader chosen to redeem man. He has felt himself the forerunner, the prophet, and so when he learns that the Marshal is capable of weaknesses common to all men, he tries to renounce his rank. In one of the most eloquent passages in the novel the Quartermaster General presents with bitter irony his view of human society: "Rapacity does not fail, else man must deny he breathes. Not rapacity: its whole vast and glorious history repudiates that . . . but all governments and nations which ever rose and endured long enough to leave their mark as such, had sprung from it . . . civilization itself is its password and Christianity its masterpiece."

The sinister Sentry-Groom, "fatherless, wifeless, sterile," stands for the rapacious and instinctive in human character. The story of the stolen race horse, an episode relating this novel to the Yoknapatawpha background, is apparently intended to show the centauric in man. During his wanderings in the American South he is baptized by the unchurched colored preacher who is his companion in theft, and he is initiated into the Masons. But his acceptance of the fatherhood of God and the fraternity of men brings him no more than a realization of the difficult lot of man; he is reborn to cynicism and desperation. To him war becomes a chance for profit through a private money-lending insurance racket he operates among the common soldiers. He dies, forced into No Man's Land at the point of the English Runner's gun, in the artillery barrage that destroys the British and Ger-

man troops who leave their trenches in a gesture of brotherhood.

The Runner carries the hope of the Corporal's mission. Once an officer, but hating man for his submission to authority and the brutalizing degradation of war, he had committed a symbolic act which reduced him to the ranks. He accepts the colored preacher's message that the Sentry-Groom rejects: "Evil is part of man, evil and sin and cowardice, the same as repentance and being brave. . . ." To him the false armistice is a promise of common man's return to dignity and order. The epithets he shouts at the dead Marshal's coffin are also a vindication of the Corporal's mission. The closing scene brings together the symbolic old prophet and the younger apostle when the battered, bleeding Runner assures the Quartermaster General, "I'm not going to die. Never." Here is affirmation of man's capacity for the suffering and endurance which are the hope of his salvation.

Although it is primarily a religious novel, *A Fable* is also political in that its immediate subject is war. The theme of war has always been one of the brightest stars in Faulkner's literary constellation, but usually it is the Civil War which illuminates the social and moral ambiguities of the homeplace. In this novel the foreign background of World War I provides thinner soil for his historical imagination than do the past and the familiar locale of the Yoknapatawpha setting. Trying to express his vision of the modern world in its entirety, he frequently resorts to comment of a peculiarly Faulknerian kind.

We are all familiar by this time with Faulkner's witness-character who has stood close to strange happenings and who seems driven not only to describe

some event as it appeared to him but also to penetrate its mystery. His function is that of chorus and interpreter. Faulkner's growing fondness for the witness-character accounts for an obvious flaw in *A Fable*. The novel contains a gallery of witnesses, to the exclusion of much that the concrete presentation of life in fiction demands. His characters' habit of philosophizing, or seeming to philosophize, reduces some of his best scenes to a flow of vocal reverie. In *A Fable* there are passages that reveal little more than a furious effort to uncover the moral and mythic significance with which his material is charged.

In this novel Faulkner, reexamining the subject of war as if the job had never been done before, reflects the feeling of World War I, when humanity's felt need for brotherhood had not yet dwindled to the hope of possible co-existence. He expresses none of the resignation or anxious desperation of recent war novels. Perhaps he can afford to ignore all that has happened since 1918 because his chief concern is not with the simple facts of violence or ideologies but with the moral aspect of all wars.

In his Yoknapatawpha novels he tried to show that slavery with its accumulation of greed and guilt was the fatal flaw that weakened the old order of the South from within. Here, in much the same manner, he makes war the "primordial fault" in human relations, the ultimate symptom of man dispossessed, of nature violated, of tradition corrupted and betrayed. War, as the old Marshal tells the Corporal, is "a vice so long ingrained in man as to have become an honorable tenet of his behavior and the national altar for his love of bloodshed and glorious sacri-

fice." Its burden of guilt, often repeated, long endured, has become for common man in our century a device of innocence. History has moved beyond the picture of war presented in *A Fable*, but it has not destroyed the moral problem which Faulkner poses. War, as Faulkner views it, helps to define the issues of a deeper conflict between those who collaborate with history, which is here the image of evil, and those who fight against it. The writer does not weight the scales. The nature of authority and its sanctions are as carefully examined as the ethic of resistance. But his meaning, conveyed by the dead generals, the young airman, the Corporal, the suicide priest, the crippled Runner, the barbed wire of the prison compound, is plainly revealed: in war all men are crucified.

In this novel Faulkner takes deliberate risks with history, characterization, and style in order to project his multiple meanings. Like certain novels by the older fabulists, *A Fable* communicates through myth a sense of felt life, a view of experience governed less by the reality of things than by rightness of vision; and it seems likely to stand in spite of, or possibly because of, the defects that strain at its structure and the texture of style. Since it is central to an understanding of Faulkner's work, critics must eventually come to terms with it in the same way that they are now evaluating Melville's *Pierre* and *The Confidence-Man*. Thus far, however, criticism has barely skimmed its surface. For a long time to come its bewildering cross-references of images and symbols embodied in character and in structural and rhetorical functions will provide opportunities for further investigation.

# Popular Arts and The Humanities

NORMAN E. NELSON

FOR SOME twenty years I have been urging that our college offer a course in popular literature—with the stipulation that I was certainly not going to teach it. When I first proposed it the only reaction was a tired smile and the resumption of serious committee business, but over the years I had the satisfaction of observing the opposition stiffen. It even thought up reasons why not: popular literature would include the comics, which is an absurdity; popular literature is not literature, which is final. Whom could we get to teach it? When it was clear that reasoning would not shut off the annoyance, the opposition shifted to emotional charges: that I was trying to set up a 'popular course' presumably for commercial reasons, and—most unkindly—that I was trying to stab culture in the back. Recognizing the academic signs that my battle was just about won, I seized the opportunity to propose a summer program in the popular arts, in which our course in popular literature could appear unobtrusively as a gesture of cooperation with the public relations policy of our administration. As you might guess, I got my way—with the vindictive stipulation that I was to teach it.

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The getting up of the course involved more extensive and painful research than I had encountered since I gave up trying to decipher medieval Latin manuscripts. My tour of duty brought me into corner stores where I thumbed through comics with a child browsing on either side of me and an uncomfortable feeling between my shoulder blades that the surly proprietor had figured me for a censorious plainclothesman. Cooperative colleagues piled my front stoop with pulps, thrillers, and stuff they had taken away from the children. But a scholar never quails at the rigors of research, or he conceals it if he does. Still, by and large, I found the stuff insufferable and gradually reasoned myself into presenting the popular media in the perspective of the serious literature of our time. As a course in popular literature it didn't amount to much, but it induced me to reflect aloud on the subject, and I sometimes heard myself say things that may be worth passing along.

I can allay at the outset one of the fears expressed by my colleagues: there is no danger that such a course will become popular in the disgraceful sense. We are all, faculty and students, so bent on putting distance between us and the lower middle class from which most of us spring that we seize upon a veneer of culture quite instinctively. A cultivated taste is almost as emancipative as a large bankroll and much easier to come by. The unregenerate hankering for lowbrow entertainment then becomes a venial vice indulged only in stolen hours well away from

highbrow witnesses. The most vehement opposition to my proposed course had come from people who, it appeared in the course of the argument, listened to radio comics, watched lady wrestlers on television (I don't think I could bear that), and habitually read detective stories. There must be something wrong here if I could only put my finger on it.

There is nothing reprehensible in the undergraduates' curiosity about Gertrude Stein or Picasso or in their eagerness to find out what Joyce or Faulkner is up to. A university, or at least the humane part of it, functions as a cultural middleman. In a democratic culture it should mediate between the aristocracy of genius (usually men who have been kicked out of college for sundry good reasons) and the rising tide of youth from the lower middle class vaguely hungry for something more than the stodgy fare provided by book clubs and parental book shelves.

But doesn't a university also exist as a means for looking out on the world from a vantage point, somewhat fenced off and somewhat elevated so that we can look down all around us as well as up at the unobstructed stars? It is this looking down at what people around us are actually reading and battenning upon that is being neglected. If we feel any responsibility for the culture of some 160 million Americans, we should try to understand their needs and tastes. Just in case we don't feel any responsibility we might well feel some concern for our own survival as medium highbrows surrounded by millions who have little time for our pursuits and, sometimes, little patience with them. They are the ones who put up our ivory-coated tower and maintain it grudgingly from year to year. Moreover, it is they who decide by their

votes and their dollars what music shall be heard in the land, what books shall be read. The highbrow, so greatly outnumbered, finds his own life harder to live as practical men in the book trade and broadcasting studios gear their machinery to the mass audience. The people will be served.

"The people Yes—but"—as Carl Sandburg should have said. In industrial society practically every boy and girl suffers chronically from *Angst*, not over inconceivable bombs, but over the persistent challenge: what I am going to do for a living? How avoid disgrace as a nonearner, a nonspender? A by-product of this drive toward vocational education is very inauspicious for culture: the people who choose the unremunerative life of the artist and the intellectual are recruited from the alienated and the eccentric. Instead of killing the ones who can't or won't live up to the laws of our jungle, we segregate them and stigmatize them as longhairs. A society in which creative artists and writers can look forward, if they are successful, to an average income of three thousand a year should not express surprise to find that poetry is getting more difficult, painting queerer, and music harder on the ears as time goes by.

The common man cannot escape the suspicion that there is something queer about artists, that it would be disastrous for his own children to enter such an unremunerative vocation. At a time when economic and political developments have greatly reduced the gulf between the rich and the poor, the cleavage between highbrow and lowbrow is deepening year by year. I do not think it is entirely the fault of the common man or even of the predators who exploit his weaknesses for com-

mmercial gain. The study of the arts and humanities in our universities has also been at fault. The propagation of culture by Ph.D.s was a doubtful blessing even in Germany, but in a country that was hardly out of the backwoods, teeming with unassimilated immigrants, and committed to mass education, it was as misconceived as it was nobly intended. The groundswell of protest against the Ph.D. has seemed to promise a more humane discipline in literature and the arts, but the new critics and their protégés, the creative writers, who are replacing the traditional scholars, may plunge us into a new scholasticism and —what is more alarming—a new religion with the professors as high priests worshipping the Artist as savior and light of the world: all that is left for the rest of us to do is to read the scripture, and listen to the inspired exegesis. A choice example of this hieratic approach is at hand in a recent *New Yorker* where Auden, performing the rites for Virginia Woolf, quotes the Sibyl's own words for the inenarrable mystery of artistic creation.

"There is a square; there is an oblong. The players take the square and place it on the oblong. They place it very accurately; they make a perfect dwelling place. Very little is left outside. The structure is now visible; what is inchoate is here stated; we are not so various or so mean; we have made oblongs and stood them on squares. This is our triumph; this is our consolation."

I believe that from long practice and some degree of sympathy I can make out who "we" are and who the players, and what the square and oblong, but I am tempted to ask what in the name of patience is the game? Auden doesn't tell us what the coy secret is, nor why it could not have been plainly stated.

No, it does not appear that the fail-

ure in communication is entirely on the side of the vulgarians. The egotistical gratification we college teachers get from displaying our virtuosity in the unfolding of arcane utterances to impressionable youth and the student's surprise that there is any meaning at all are both so absorbing that no one has the presence of mind to ask: is the statement so boldly imaginative and so brilliantly interpreted true, or probable, or even meaningful? Besides, there isn't time in the class hour to take that up. But to teach students by weaving spells about them and reducing them to dependence upon the priest's Latin smacks of obscurantism: it is certainly not enlightenment. Without denying anyone the right to prophecy, or to interpret scripture, we can hope that college teachers will not confuse Lawrence and Eliot, Joyce and Virginia Woolf, in a single Godhead, and that their various and disparate revelations will be scrutinized before swallowing.

After our long struggle to get contemporary literature into the college curriculum there can be no talk of eliminating it. But in turn it should not be permitted to crowd out Burns and Byron, Thackery or Kipling. Nor should it exclude some attention to the popular literature and art that floods the channels of mass communication. Lovely or unlovely, the popular arts are and will be studied somehow by somebody. In the course of my persuasions I reminded my colleagues that pompous lecturers on the social significance of Eliot or Joyce are tacitly denying the much greater impact in a mass civilization of superman and the lone ranger. I even hinted darkly that the social sciences might eventually, if we persisted in our neglect, take over the study of popular literature.

Little did I know, and my colleagues less: the social sciences have these many years been studying the popular arts as mass media of communication. In some vague way we had all heard of it, but what man of sensibility reading the words "mass media" and "communication" would attach any meaning to them: he would shudder at the vulgar jargon and turn away. I have since spent many a long hour over sociological monographs, many of them as empty as they are execrably written. If I may say so without reflecting on any one—least of all myself—the study of mass communications does not attract the best minds. But this need not, and I think should not be so. On the contrary, one of the most compelling reasons for the study of popular literature is the need to wrest from sociology some share of control over the field so that popular literature will be studied not merely in quantitative terms, nor merely in terms of social dynamics, lest an ethically irresponsible scientific study of mass media result in the perfection of instruments and techniques for the manipulation of the mass mind. The sociologists may not be the monsters that literary people imagine them to be, but they may well be creating a monster that will overshadow the hydrogen bomb. They are building an impersonal machinery for analyzing human beings into standard interchangeable parts in order to sort them into handy pigeonholes and reassemble them to specification—at the behest of anyone with enough money or political power to rent or commandeer the machinery.

Yet we have stood idly by in ignorance or indifference while this important field has been preempted by social scientists. Our excuse has been that popular art is not art at all but

vulgar amusement, and that the mass media do not constitute the culture that really matters. I have already confessed to a strain of this snobbery, and perhaps I have passed the age when one is capable of a change of taste, but colleges should encourage some of the hardier young men to a sympathetic study of literature as she is read, and art as it is sold in cigar stores.

The distinction between art and popular art is, in my opinion, a specious one, fostered by a hieratic definition of art as epiphany or revelation of top secrets to a specially indoctrinated elect. Without denying that art and especially literature may extend up to such dizzy heights, one may question whether it must do so to qualify as art. Writers are running a terrible risk if they continue to enforce on their readers the tensions and perplexities of their private myths and mysticisms. Unless their imaginings are communicable and enjoyable even middlebrow readers will turn to biographies for their evenings rather than to agonizing novels and ritual dramas. Entertainment and ease should not automatically stigmatize a book as non-art. The sensitive and cultivated literary men are isolating themselves from not only the millions of common men who by voting with ballots and dollar bills control the kind of world we live in and limit the choices we ourselves may make, but also from those men of uncommon intelligence, ability, and force of character who are indispensable leaders in the active life of business, politics, and the professions.

These practical men are not universally inferior to the creative artists: the guilty feeling that they have not cultivated their less public virtues may for a time induce them to rustle programs in concert halls or turn the pages of a

book; but they are not likely to give the most arduous efforts of their minds to evening reading or music, and if they fail to get some refreshment out of the experience, biological necessity will turn them to Amos and Andy. The best of them as they peruse the difficult moderns are likely to vacillate between an uneasy feeling that they are missing something and a shrewd suspicion that they are being had. If as time goes on they discover how much of the new painting, music, and creative writing is neither good nor great but merely imposed on them by cultists, the reaction may be so indiscriminate as to sweep out the good with the bad. If we are to stay in the same community with these men we must not deny them intelligence and good will, and we had better not compel them to choose between Eddie Guest and Mallarmé: if such is to be their choice I shall put my money unhappily on Guest. What is more likely to happen is that the academic prophets of symbolism will be left crying in their wilderness while a new literary and artistic movement arises elsewhere, perhaps, as in the Elizabethan age, out of the despised popular arts.

The arts cannot remain as they are at present, a producers' monopoly with a highly specialized set of experts in sensibility and symbolism in control of selection for publication, criticism, and the teaching of the young. It is only in recent times that the artists have set up as a race apart. Older social systems gave them the comparative security of retainers to wealthy or powerful patrons who required in return for their beneficence only that they be well pleased. The artist was commissioned or desired to paint a certain subject and was expected to paint it in a certain way. He wasn't expected to startle his patron

nor to reduce him to the humiliating status of an enquiring school boy. Literary artists were sometimes more obscure, especially certain troubadours who did not want the lady's husband to catch the drift of their canzone, but most writers labelled their allegories, and even Dante gives the literate reader full measure of meaning and enjoyment without so roiling the poetic surface that only those with second sight can see what, if anything, is beneath the stylistic obfuscations. The folk artists were similarly responsive to their audience, partly because they were socially integrated with them but also because they were so directly in communication with them: they contrived always to be within toss of a penny.

But for the last two hundred years the poet has been alienated: bohemian, aesthete, *poète maudit*, even *assassiné*. And he has developed a compensatory arrogance as a magician who creates for us the world of images in which we live or, as in Auden's figure, a pagan sea God unamenable to the petty decorum of civilization, or, as Eliot and Maritain present him, a Christ figure who must suffer the indignity inherent in human existence and the loneliness of utter righteousness and the excruciating agonies of poetic creation in order that the liquid notes of salvation be heard in the wasted land. Couldn't somebody tell Eliot that the vicarious atonement has already taken place?

While the highbrow poet has been consoling himself with the martyrdom of style, the lowbrow artist has found himself more substantial compensation. The folk artists disappeared when the folk disappeared about two hundred years ago, and folk art is now strictly for isolated mountain folk or antiquaries in sophisticated night-clubs. Instead

we have the popular artist composing songs in tin-pan alley, drawing comic strips, and rhyming "dancing" with "romancing." The alienation is just as great as that of the highbrow, and just as ominous, perhaps more so; but it is not the alienation of the lonely, feckless ones, nor of isolated peaks like Eliot drawing our upward gaze. The popular artist has the approved look of an alert money maker. He moves prosperously in New York social and business circles investing his money with as much prudence and skill as a doctor. He has lived the American dream of converting rags into riches, has made himself a popular idol, the fascinating topic of gossip columns, the hero of novels, movies, and television. He is not folk though he can be folksy—as common as an old shoe for a handsome price. But unlike his creative cousin in the lower income bracket he does not usually admire himself, for he knows that he is a captive artist. The masters of the mass media are the men who can lay out millions for radio and television. The popular artist's contact with the huckster gives him a low opinion not only of the huckster, but also of himself, and of the public which buys his shopworn tricks.

The level of popular entertainment is not, however, determined solely by sponsors trying to reach the lowest common denominator. Social legislation and the improved economic status of the common man have brought an enormous increase in leisure and the expectation of entertainment twenty hours a day, year in and year out. Even if the mass audience preferred good music, good art, and good drama, the insatiable maw of the mass media would gobble the production of genius, past, present, and to come, in practically no time leaving vast stretches to be filled

with stuff hastily worked up by hacks to meet the deadlines. If our economy could stand some diversion of manpower from the manufacture of gadgets and lotions, it looks as if our culture could make use of a number of writers, composers, and artists who are now operating lathes or bottling machines. It looks also as if some of our talented youngsters might divert their energies from divination and prophesy to the modest task of entertainment.

The popular artists who appeared on our summer program were acutely aware of and frank to the point of indiscretion about their own captivity and their contempt for their captivated mass audience. If we could only convey to the public the popular artist's low appraisal of his own work, his amazement that so many are taken in by it, and the cynical know-how with which he exploits our weaknesses, we could be sure of a chastening effect. Once the sucker is aware of what is being done to him and how it is done, once he realizes that the men who control his imaginative experience consider him half witted, he must become self-conscious; and self criticism is the beginning of wisdom in matters of taste.

If this sounds like an academic tirade recall that I am summing up what we learned from the popular artists and advertising experts themselves with an occasional assist from imported child psychologists. Though some of my colleagues had threatened, rhetorically, to resign if we brought commercial artists in to cheapen higher education, those sufficiently open-minded to attend the talks were impressed by the candid self appraisal of these philistines. Instead of being corrupted we were aroused to a realization of our opportunity as cultural mediators to do our part for the

captive public, the captive artist, and even for the captive sponsor, who may become a victim of his own superman.

Academic study of the popular arts can never have the dramatic effectiveness of legislative action or police regulation but this seems to me the best possible justification for it. Whatever improvement in the mass media can be safely accomplished—and we should not expect too much—can be better accomplished through disinterested examination and evaluation by educators exercising the right not to censor but to censure. Our business democracy must permit freedom of trade in ideas, however unsponsored; otherwise we will have just business without the democracy.

The disinterested investigations are already going on in the social sciences but as these become more determinedly objective, more scientifically indifferent to ends and values, the departments of literature must come out of their schizoid shells, find out what the public taste is and how it is being affected by the mass dissemination of entertainment aimed at the lowest common denominator. It is arguable that college highbrows are not the best judges of what is good for the masses, but in a democratic culture it is not likely that their views will dominate, or will have any more than a moderating effect on the peddling of popular art; but in a democratic culture that is all that we academics have a right to expect, and all we ought, democratically, to want.

Moreover, there is always the chance that education might work both ways; the professor who has crawled into the eighteenth century and pulled the nineteenth century in over him might learn that certain elegancies are irrevocably

lost to all but antiquaries along with silver shoe buckles and lace cuffs; that some of his cherished masterpieces have some of the characteristics for which he abuses the popular arts. And the new critics who are replacing the traditional scholars might come to realize that the popular arts with their sensuous appeal, realistic representation, and exciting plots are, however meretriciously, satisfying natural and legitimate needs that are not being satisfied by the contemporary masterpieces with their ineffable epiphanies. It might be worth our while to find out why a poem by Eddie Guest or a Rockwell magazine cover is as good as it is and why it appeals to so many people, not merely to the hopelessly "common" but to men of uncommon virtues and abilities who have distinguished themselves by valuable services to our civilization and whose only defect is that they have not taken time out to cultivate a taste for Joyce, Eliot, Bartok, and Picasso. Such men certainly should not be allowed to suppress our geniuses, but neither should our geniuses be encouraged to despise and ignore their tastes as uncivilized or vulgar. Perhaps in his strategic role as middleman the educator might be able to persuade the creative artist to forget his wounded pride and rejoin the human race. Although my own incursion into the popular arts has taught me that I am too far gone to adapt my own tastes sufficiently for the purpose, I should like to claim the privilege of an elder statesman in the humanities to suggest that some of our hardier young men be encouraged to develop research and teaching programs based on a concern and respectful sympathy for the public and its tastes.

# Shakespeare in Action—A Report

FRANK W. WADSWORTH

IN HER essay on Shakespeare (*College English*, March, 1954), Margery Bailey criticizes the academic preoccupation with "words, words, words," claiming that what Shakespearean criticism needs is "the study of Shakespeare's plays in action." She feels that there is only one true laboratory for critical analysis, the theatre for which Shakespeare's plays were actually written. Such a laboratory exists, she reminds us, in Ashland, Oregon, where under the direction of Angus Bowmer the Oregon Shakespeare Festival last summer offered its fourteenth season of Shakespearean plays performed on a reconstruction of the Elizabethan stage. Professor Bailey modestly omitted mention of her own important role as academic adviser to the Festival.

The Oregon Festival offered, in nightly rotation, *Hamlet*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *2 Henry VI*, a group of plays not only revealing Shakespeare's talent at its widest, but comprising, thanks to the inclusion of the realistic comedy, *The Merry Wives*, a brief chronicle of the most popular dramatic types of his own day. Intelligently directed, magnificently costumed, and acted by competent if at times inexperienced actors, the plays were ideally chosen to test both

Professor Bowmer's modified version of the Fortune Theatre and the principles of Elizabethan staging in general. From the performances, so true to the spirit of Professor Bailey's essay, two important conclusions can be drawn, one concerning the effectiveness of the Elizabethan stage, the other the manner in which this stage should be utilized.

## I

In considering the first problem it will help to describe briefly the Ashland stage, which represents with unusual accuracy the general characteristics of the Tudor stage as envisaged by most scholars, including Professor Bailey. It has a large outer acting area, covered in part by a roof supported by the traditional two pillars. Two entrance doors flank this outer-stage, while at the back there are inner-lower and inner-upper stages, the latter flanked by casements on either side. The only admittedly unhistorical feature about the staging of the plays at Ashland was the occasional use of a curtain between the pillars; with this exception the stage offered an unusually fair trial of Leslie Hotson's contention that to present Shakespeare's plays in the Elizabethan theatre as it is traditionally reconstructed is to put them into "the strait-jacket of an imaginary, awkward, and remote double-storied alcove."

The verdict went against Professor Hotson. The Ashland productions demonstrated conclusively that the Eliza-

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bethan theatre as reconstructed by Angus Bowmer is an extremely effective staging area. First of all it was surprisingly good acoustically. While the rapid delivery of the actors and the noise of complaining lumber trucks on the adjacent streets sometimes caused the *al fresco* spectator to miss something of what was spoken on the *outer stage*, lines delivered from either of the inner-stages came across with exceptional clarity, so that one was convinced that with the triple-tiered walls of the actual Elizabethan theatre cutting off the outside noises, the sixteenth century spectator had no trouble hearing.

Similarly, there were no serious sightline difficulties. On a few occasions an actor did lose himself behind a pillar or behind the corner of an inner-stage for a moment, but such moments were not distracting, having in fact a kind of familiar reality to them; for in life one is not always front and center, and the occasional movement in an out of visual range seemed natural. In great part, of course, this naturalness came from the neutral background against which the action was set. On the picture frame stage we feel that the picture is incomplete if we can not see everything every minute, but on the Elizabethan stage, fluid rather than static, the momentary disappearance of a character who may still be heard speaking is simply part of its truer, less superficial reality.

Even more unexpected were the tremendous visual effects of which the neutral background of the Elizabethan stage is capable. Costumes, which so frequently inherit the falseness of the painted scenery reflecting them, stood out in brilliant contrast against the sombre stage. *The Winter's Tale* and 2

*Henry VI* were particularly colorful, with the latter revealing in a most interesting fashion the dramatic function of the pageantry so much a part of the Elizabethan drama. The flashing banners, the gleaming weapons, the powerful and contrasting colors of the long, fifteenth century robes told the story of the half barbaric, greedy court of Henry as eloquently as the dialogue. We read much about Shakespeare's bare stage, but the simple, relatively unadorned background is only a foil to the brilliant, fluid color which fills the stage, color not merely decorative but an organic part of the whole that is the Shakespearean play.

For thus in part Shakespeare creates the mood of his action, not alone in words, as the schoolbooks tells us, but by his rich pageantry as well. If the sombre yet powerful colors of the nobles in *2 Henry VI* help to create the atmosphere of passionate selfishness which marks that play, the gay, sparkling costumes of *The Winter's Tale* reveal in their turn that what we are about to see is indeed a fairy tale. So, too, the flatter, cooler colors of *The Merry Wives* mark the middle-class atmosphere of that comedy. In addition, the colorfulness of the characters against the neutral background of the sceneless stage forces the audience to concentrate upon the actor rather than the scenery, producing an intimacy between actor and spectator relatively rare on the modern stage with its invisible barrier between players and audience.

This intimacy works many wonders, creating a world that belongs as much to the spectator as to the actor, for the former by the use of his imagination is an active partner in its creation. As a result, he is more inclined to believe

what goes on in it than the spectator who must view the action of the play through the narrow limits of the proscenium arch. This ability—or better yet, desire—to believe was strikingly demonstrated at Ashland by that laughter-producing stage direction in *The Winter's Tale*, "Exit, pursued by a bear." On a scenic stage, with painted trees trying desperately to look real, Antigonus, fleeing an apprentice actor trying desperately to look like a bear, might well appear ridiculous. But in a forest existing only as a sort of delightful conspiracy between the spectator and Antigonus, where trees, grass and flowers were measured only in terms of one's willingness to surrender to the imagination, the mere mention of danger was exciting, and the momentary glimpse of a bear's head from behind the curtains all the imagination needed to picture Antigonus' plight.

Another result of this intimacy—and at the same time a source of it—is the effectiveness of certain seemingly antiquated dramatic conventions such as the aside. When, for example, York in *2 Henry VI*, forced to dissemble before Buckingham, the King's emissary, confided to the audience in an aside his fury at having to demean himself, one felt nothing undramatic about his confession. He was at the moment physically closer to the audience than to Buckingham, and he had earlier, by reason of his candid soliloquies, made it a kind of partner in his villainy. As a result, while the audience was not exactly sympathetic towards York's schemes, his disposition was in a very real sense the spectators' own, and it seemed quite fitting that they should be informed of it. The soliloquies too, those early, supposedly undramatic, revelations of in-

tent which mark *2 Henry VI* and *The Merry Wives* in particular, seemed natural and right as York, Ford, or whoever it happened to be, came forward and confided his plans to an audience, whose presence as well as participation he openly admitted. Thus a convention that seems inept in reading became an effective dramatic device upon the stage for which it was designed. And so it was with other "curiosities" of Elizabethan drama. Old Hamlet's ghost, appearing unobtrusively from a tiring room door or disappearing with quiet dignity behind the inner-stage curtains, seemed natural—or if you will, unnatural—because it was seen against a background which has the adaptability of the imagination itself. And, *mirabile dictu*, the trap used to remove the ghost at the end of the closet scene revealed itself as an unexpectedly efficient machine, causing the trouble<sup>1</sup> spirit of the old king to disappear with a breathtaking swiftness made all the more startling by the casualness of its entrance a few lines earlier. Here again the inherent dramatic nature of Shakespeare's stage was strikingly revealed, the contrast between the ghost's sudden drop from sight and its earlier slow and dignified exits making it clear that Old Hamlet would be seen no more; that from now on the son was indeed on his own.

One could extol other virtues of the Ashland, and therefore of Shakespeare's, stage—the unfettered freedom enjoyed by the actors on its unlocalized areas, with the resultant effectiveness of the mob scenes in *2 Henry VI*; the increased dramatic effect of the seemingly tedious narrative parts of the same play, where the opportunity for continual movement did away with that Senecan stiffness which it seems to have

in reading; the success of the revelation of Hermione on the inner-stage at the end of *The Winter's Tale*. But enough has been noted to suggest that the Elizabethan stage is indeed, as Professor Bailey maintains, a most versatile and effective staging area.

## II

The question which now must be considered is how the modern producer can best utilize this stage. Professor Bailey's answer would be to make the production as Elizabethan as possible. Reflecting no doubt her influence as academic adviser, the Ashland Festival attempted to do just this. But the results were uneven, and it became clear that it is possible to have a Shakespeare too Elizabethan.

The dangers of falling too completely in love with history can best be seen by looking briefly at each of the four Ashland productions. First, however, certain general characteristics of all should be mentioned. Notable was their faithfulness to the texts, *Hamlet* offering the full Folio text plus the unique 1604 Quarto soliloquy, "How all occasions do inform against me," with the reference to the boy companies in II, ii, the only sizeable cut. Only 2 *Henry VI*, which cut the scene of Jack Cade's death, had a major omission. All four plays were performed without intermission, and with one episode flowing into another without hesitation. In addition, the actors spoke with extreme rapidity, and, while moving about freely, were inclined to be somewhat stylized in their gestures and postures, the latter the result perhaps of inexperience as much as choice. All of the characteristics mentioned are generally taken, rightly or wrongly, to have marked the production of Shakespeare's

plays in his own day. Let us see, then, what they contributed to the understanding and entertainment of a modern audience.

In general, I think one can say that the more familiar a Shakespeare play is and the more universal its appeal, the more chance there is of its effectiveness being reduced by indiscriminate historical production. Thus *Hamlet* seemed in many ways the most disappointing of the Ashland productions.

In the first place, it was too long, running almost three hours without a break, a long time for even the most experienced company to hold its audience enthralled, and a tiring experience when the play is one of *Hamlet's* tense excitement. Yet this was but part of the expense of attempting the full text. There was also the too swift movement from one episode to the next. It is true that Elizabethan drama was predicated upon a smooth, fluid transition from one episode to another, with no distracting time interval for the raising and lowering of curtains, changing of sets, and so forth. But few of these transitions are made more effective by having an episode infringe noticeably upon its predecessor, while some gain immeasurably from a moment's hesitation between scenes. Nevertheless, the Ashland *Hamlet* crowded one episode on another so that frequently the mood of the new action was upon the spectator before he had fully assimilated the essence of the earlier. Sudden contrast can be effective, but it can also lead to confusion.

The need for expedition also governed the speaking of the lines, resulting in far less change of tempo than the dialogue demands. The soliloquies in particular were hurried over, the pregnant pauses and modulations to which

they are susceptible largely unexploited, with the unhappy result that for the great and familiar dramatic poetry of the play was substituted a kind of pseudo-renaissance rhetoric. The rapid delivery not only lost nuances of meaning and therefore much poetic beauty, it also weakened much of the humor. Timing, as every comedian knows, is the essence of the joke, and the Polonius and the gravedigger scenes fell far short of their potential with indiscriminately fast delivery both reducing the emphasis required for certain key lines and depriving the audience of that brief moment needed to savor the joke to the full. The Elizabethan ear, we are told, was trained to fast delivery and in rapid speech could distinguish subtleties of sadness and of mirth. But the modern spectator is not so keyed, and even with dialogue as familiar as that of *Hamlet* needs time to make the connection between ear and imagination.

If the producer has to make the choice between an omnibus *Hamlet*, presented at a breakneck pace, or a judiciously cut production, played at a tempo closer to the receptive powers of a modern audience, the answer seems to be that he should cut judiciously, wagering his own taste and understanding of the playwright against the expectations of his audience. Perhaps editors have a duty to give us every syllable Shakespeare wrote (or might have written), but we may be sure that the King's Men were not afraid to trim their text and that they did not try to cram *Hamlet's* three thousand and sixty-odd lines into the "two hours' traffic" of their stage. It would seem, in fact, to be more Elizabethan to cut than not to cut.

But the text was not wholly responsible for the pace of the Ashland pro-

duction; in part the tempo resulted from the desire to present an entirely Elizabethan production in line with Professor Bailey's suggestions. Thus the rapid delivery can be interpreted in part as a reaction against those players who, in Professor Bailey's words, stand and recite great speeches. Most scholars would have us believe that the Elizabethan actor spoke formally and rapidly and that this was a style of acting particularly suited to the role of Hamlet, who is not, as some may have thought, a hesitant introspective, but merely a renaissance prince faced by the problems of testing the honesty of a ghost and then finding a suitable (i.e., rational) revenge. For this is the Elizabethan Hamlet envisioned by Professor Bailey, a Hamlet who is a man of action with no problem but that of the means of obtaining his revenge, a Hamlet whose lengthy self-criticism is as a result almost always inaccurate. And the effect of overincreasing the tempo of the performance is exactly that—the hurried soliloquies lose their significance in terms of Hamlet's character and he seems merely an impatient young man, anxious to get on with the job and angry because he cannot. On the other hand, just what keeps him from getting on with it is never quite clear.

How this rapid handling of key sequences can change—if not destroy—the meaning of the tragedy was amply demonstrated by the fate of the two soliloquies. "O that this too, too solid flesh would melt," Hamlet's strongly emotional protest against the shattering of his most cherished ideals, was hurried over to the extent that the uncertainty of Hamlet's emotional and mental state was never apparent—one had instead the puzzling spectacle of a man whose

almost breezy delivery and actions contradicted the poignancy of his words. For the stylized posturing which marked the playing of the role was as distracting as the *prestissimo* dialogue, making Hamlet's emotions seem superficial and his talk of self-slaughter unconvincing. Nor was Hamlet's most famous soliloquy any more successful. Performed as Professor Bailey suggests, with Hamlet alternately reading from and commenting on a volume of renaissance philosophy, it revealed little more than intellectual impatience on the part of the protagonist—more Prufrock than Hamlet—and was quite lacking in verbal music and poetic beauty. Professor Bailey, of course, believes the soliloquy is not poetry of "high order," but many generations of readers and theatre-goers have found it to be just that, and a performance which cannot realize some of the poetic greatness of the lines can hardly be called successful.

While the Ashland experiment in presenting an Elizabethan *Hamlet* was interesting and instructive, it was disappointing as a theatrical experience. With the focus shifted from Hamlet to his revenge, Shakespeare's great play faded to a typical revenge tragedy, Kydian rather than Shakespearean, melodramatic rather than tragic. The action and intrigue became everything while the poetry and its profound significance were quite lost. Far be it from me to urge a return to a Victorian set piece in which the protagonist is no more than Professor Bailey's "brooding drone." But *Hamlet*, in spite of its affinities to certain Elizabethan dramatic genres and its employment of traditional Elizabethan attitudes, is more than an archeological curiosity and has more significance to a modern audience

than the mere problem of how to gain revenge. Only a production which so far recognizes changes in audience tastes and capacities as to make this significance clear can be called successful.

While *Hamlet*, which like its author is for all time, suffers severely from a production which attempts to substitute historical accuracy for meaningful direction, those plays whose appeal is more distinctly of an age are more susceptible to total Elizabethanism. For example, while both *The Merry Wives* and *The Winter's Tale* are concerned with the age-old problem of jealousy, both view it from a point of view in many respects narrowly Elizabethan, insisting on what we today might call a superficial or purely social concept of honor. The Ashland performances with their slightly stylized acting and their unfamiliar verbal tempo had the virtue of making it easier for the audience to accept this unfamiliar attitude as real, for paradoxically the hint of something alien in the characters on stage forced the spectator to project himself into their frame of mind and accept their social standards; he did not sit and wait with increasing disappointment for them to come to him with something old and familiar. The speed of performance helped too in this acceptance, for the action swept on with such swiftness that one never had time to question the assumptions behind it. *The Winter's Tale*, especially, benefited from the rapid playing, for it is in its way a dream, and it is fitting that as in a dream the action pass swiftly as well as vividly. Another virtue of the rapid pace was the masking of some of the plays' structural weaknesses. The sacrifice of Antigonus with its note of jarringly realism did not haunt one at the

end of *The Winter's Tale*, nor did the quarrel between Falstaff and Shallow which gets *The Merry Wives* off to a false start seem at all conspicuous in the hasty confusion of that comedy's getting under way. Even the anticlimactic final trick on Falstaff gained credibility from the jovial haste of the play's conclusion, Falstaff's gullibility seeming somewhat less in view of the other disclosures which followed so hard upon it.

But the ledger did not show all profit. Inevitably the spectator lost much of the subtlety of the dialogue in both plays, the verbal humor of *The Merry Wives* suffering particularly. The punning, the skillful use of dialect, in fact the whole leavening of wit which makes its middle-class dialogue superior to most realistic comedies of the time, were weakened by too rapid delivery. Perhaps an Elizabethan audience could have savored the jest; the Ashland audience could not. The situations of *The Merry Wives* remained funny, but even here poor timing occasioned by the unvaried tempo resulted in far fewer belly laughs than the comedy deserves, a fate shared by the low comedy scenes in *The Winter's Tale*.

Of all the productions, *2 Henry VI* was the hardest to find fault with. This history, which almost everyone would put far down the list of Shakespeare's plays, was revealed not only as first-rate theatre, but as a far better drama than one would suspect from reading. A serious work, showing in its picture of the selfish, grasping nobles of Henry's court the political rottenness which led to the Wars of the Roses, it turned out to be an ideal subject for the Festival's fast-paced Elizabethan staging. The reasons for this seem clear. One is the lack of any real poetic distinction in the

play, a weakness somewhat palliated by rapid delivery of the lines. Another is that the average spectator brings to the play a mind uncluttered by private convictions about its significance; he is prepared to accept what he sees and hears in a relatively uncritical manner. Furthermore, *2 Henry VI* has an appeal which is at least partly archeological (which is not to say that it is entirely irrelevant today). This means that it is, unlike *Hamlet*, a surface play with a significance lying almost entirely in what actually is said and done and not in any inexpressible third dimension revealed by the action but not stated explicitly by it. The spectator can understand the play with less effort; thus the rapid playing, which in *Hamlet's* case glossed over the confusion in the protagonist's mind, here accentuated the political confusion of the Lancastrian court. The endless invective of *2 Henry VI*, the frantic curses of the defeated politicians, were infused by the fierce pace of the performance with just that touch of confused unintelligibility proper to such ravings, whereas in the more traditional delivery with its false air of dignity the endless invective is apt to appear bombastic and foolish. The mob scenes, too, had a kind of organic confusion instead of the unintegrated dither typical of most productions, so that the mob's senseless ferocity was truly frightening. Indeed, this performance by itself made the trip to Ashland worth while, for it revealed that this drama, so often characterized as a grotesque of minor characters, is a unified play with a wealth of forcefully created dramatic figures—Gloucester and his wife, the fiery Suffolk, York, Margaret, Jack Cade—all drawn into irresistible conflict with one another

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# John O'Hara Up to Now

JOHN PORTZ

JOHN O'HARA'S literary work, five novels and six collections of short stories, has been widely read and has been almost as thoroughly discussed among educated readers as the work of any other writer of the hardboiled school. This general acceptance has sprung from the amoral and sexual nature of his themes and from the easy colloquialism of his style; his critical respectability has to some extent depended upon his twenty-year association with *The New Yorker*, America's most powerful magazine among the intelligent, the well-to-do, and the sophisticated.

O'Hara began his career, as far as the general reading public was concerned in 1934, with his first novel, *Appointment in Samarra*, a scathing portrait of his hometown, Pottsville, Pennsylvania. This initial volume was followed in the next year by his most popular novel, *Butterfield 8*, and by his first selection of short stories, *The Doctor's Son and Other Stories*. These, like *Appointment in Samarra*, contained elements reminiscent of the author's youth and his apprenticeship as a newspaper man in Pottsville and New York. Several years as a script writer for the Hollywood studios resulted in the bitter novel, *Hope of Heaven* (1938), and two volumes of short stories, *Files on Parade* (1939) and *Pal Joey* (1940). Originally published in *The New Yorker*, the latter consisted of a series of letters written by Joey, a third-rate nightclub singer and scrounger. O'Hara

later adapted the stories to musical comedy, in which form they were successfully produced on Broadway and then transformed into a movie. During the forties, there appeared *Pipe Night* (1945), O'Hara's best book of short stories, and two additional collections, *Hellbox* (1947) and *All the Girls He Wanted* (1949). His most recent works have been *A Rage to Live* (1949), an attempt at a loose, panoramic novel, and *The Farmer's Hotel* (1951), a novel whose tight, coincidental construction suggests marketability in the movies or the theater. Both novels were adversely received by the critics. Indeed, since the excited reviews of his first novel, O'Hara's writings have been greeted with less and less enthusiasm by the professional critics as the years have passed, and with a growing sense of irritation behind which seems to lie a recognition of abilities misdirected and potentialities undeveloped. *Appointment in Samarra* still remains O'Hara's finest piece of work, but what was so promising in 1934 appears now to have been, after all, the summit of the author's work, rather than the beginning effort of an expanding talent.

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The failure of O'Hara's work to improve seems to me to stem ultimately from his inability to discover in his books and to reveal to us the true meaning of people and things. This basic insufficiency is seen, first, in the absence of an ideological framework; second,

in his choice of character and his treatment of it; third, in his failure to treat successfully themes elemental to human nature; and fourth, in the unnecessary frugality of his formal techniques.

As a surviving member of the "lost generation," O'Hara out-Fitzgeralds Fitzgerald in trying to convince us of the nonsignificance of life. Fitzgerald, however, actually found meaning in poetic metaphor and in an intensely sad compassion—just as Hemingway, for his part, found a framework of moral reference in a primitivistically simple philosophy. But O'Hara has carried out fully the self-illusion, the amorality of the newspaper-trained man who never judges, but only sees and reports. This attitude has passed, among earlier writers like Lardner and O. Henry, as fairness and objectivity, and as part of the duty required by a realistic technique. But it is actually an avoidance of the serious artist's responsibility to interpret the world to his reader.

As a result, there is no intellectualism, no speculation, reflection, or generalization to give substance to O'Hara's writings. His work is unsupported by an interest or belief in any of the social structures or wider patterns of the culture. He has lived through the First World War, The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the Second World War, but his stories are only superficially aware of these phenomena. His knowledge of economics is confined to a familiarity with the machinations of hat-check girls; he sees politics through the eyes of the bribe-taking ward-heelers he writes about.

There is, however, an important exception to this generalization: it is *Appointment in Samarra*, his best novel. This book is given a firmer unity and a

more intense social significance by O'Hara's knowledge of the cultural groups which wage a seldom acknowledged battle in the Pennsylvania hard-coal town of Gibbsville, and he has a distinct way of looking at each of the groups. The highest rung on the social ladder is occupied by the rich Lantango Street crowd, English or Scotch of descent and Episcopalian of religion; they glory in an unimpeachable family background which demands good manners and bad behavior. The middle class is composed of the stolid Pennsylvania Dutch, with their self-satisfied, disapproving, Lutheran respectability. Each of these groups feels contempt for the manners and morals of the other, but they join hands in their dislike of Jews and Catholics. Although *Appointment in Samarra* does not deal extendedly with the question of anti-Semitism, O'Hara does depict its furtive appearance here and there throughout the novel, chiefly in connection with "restricted" real estate areas and other social prerogatives. And some of O'Hara's best and most authentic work—and this applies to all of his novels and short stories—describes the menaced minority into which he himself was born, the Irish Catholics. He interprets the out-group psychology of the Irish, their clannishness, reverse-snobbishness, and touchiness; and he sees how, by a series of complex social pressures, they have been squeezed into a hard, main-chance core which has to resort to subterfuge and threats of reprisal in order to gain recognition for itself. He is entirely fair in representing the characteristics of this group, disliking "professional Irishmen" quite as much as he admires the pragmatic honesty of Father Creedon, who controls the Irish bloc

of votes and does his best to keep the teetering balance between Catholic and Protestant in the restless town. In fact, the friendly alliance between Julian English and Father Creedon is the most hopeful note in *Appointment in Samarra*. But this is the only novel in which personal disasters are clearly interrelated with public ones.

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O'Hara's inability to deal profoundly with life, however, rises not merely from the absence of ideas, but from a rigid emotional mood or attitude toward human beings which conditions every aspect of his work: that is, an engrained distrust of human nature, a sort of secular doctrine of natural depravity. This is the underlying emotional concept, the basic observation to be made about O'Hara's work. O'Hara has often been called one of the best of contemporary satirists, but his satirical qualities are somewhat blunted by the absence of a plane of practical ideals in his work—let alone abstract ideals—and by the absence of that savage indignation by which satirists indicate a better way. Perhaps O'Hara should not be called a satirist at all, for he never shows us a normal frame of reference, and never permits us a chance for comparison. He will not be outraged, and he will not be placed in the position of a corrector of mankind's follies. He has only one posture with which to face the world: that of the reporter who habitually looks only for bad news. All of his characters are sick, and their author himself apparently accepts sickness as the natural and ineradicable state of man. He does not want to be, as all satirists must be, a moralist.

Through his short stories and novels there troops a procession of the para-

sitic, the vicious, the lost, and fearful; and all are ruled by self-interest. O'Hara usually catches these people at a disadvantage, at the in-between moment—not at work or in honest affection, but at the cocktail hour, just getting up, walking home tired from work, beginning an affair or ending one, gossiping. None of them—not even resourceful, truculent Pal Joey—is really well buttressed against other people. Their most commonly shared feeling is that of an obscure guilt whose origin, nature, and even existence they are not aware of. Consequently, all of them wear masks which conceal them from others; many of them try to buy their way through the world emotionally as well as financially; all live in fear of the doorman, the waitress, the chance remark.

Only a few characters are not painted in accordance with this dismal judgment on human nature. The Irish Catholic physicians in O'Hara's novels and stories are toughly benign figures of masculine power and authority, acting as the one merciful element in O'Hara's world. They ignore the law, money, and social boundaries, being almost alone among O'Hara's characters in their capacity for cutting across the stratified lines of American life. All of them bear resemblances to each other, and all appear to be projections of O'Hara's own father. Another character to escape the general condemnation is Jim Malloy, "The Doctor's Son," who apparently grows up and becomes, in *Hope of Heaven*, the closest approximation of a conventional hero that O'Hara has so far drawn. Malloy, with a background of reporting and scriptwriting, is both a main participant and an unbiased observer, whose disposition resembles that

of the stylized and conventional hero of the hardboiled school; he hides his sensitivities behind a stoical matter-of-factness; he obscures his love feelings behind a disillusionedly direct approach to sex. A certain anonymity about him fulfills the prerequisites of the narrator-device and is in itself suggestive of impassive qualities considered desirable among writers like Cain and Hemingway. Malloy is not, however, a very romantic figure, and should be differentiated from more fabulous modern heroes such as Jay Gatsby and Frederick Henry. O'Hara is no believer in current romantic individualism. In Malloy there is some restlessness, but no revolt; many of O'Hara's people are conscious outcasts, but their deviation is not an exhilarating rebellion.

O'Hara's *real* resentment for his characters and his *seeming* indifference and unfeelingness for them have a way of making them appear to be bound to the inessential and the petty specific within. Perhaps that is why O'Hara has rarely been able to discover the inner reasons why his actors do what they do. Grace Tate's promiscuity is never psychologically accounted for, although *A Rage to Live* turns on this characteristic of hers; Joe Rogg's murder of Martha Paul and Howard Pomfret, in *The Farmer's Hotel*, turns on Rogg's motiveless malignity, rather than on the characters of the lovers. O'Hara makes no use of the Freudian concepts which have proved so fruitful to the moderns from Joyce on; he only occasionally employs the interior monolog (and never in its deeper stages) or the dream or other introspective techniques; his interest in sexual aberration is unhappily contemptuous and prurient; and Gloria Wandrous, in *Butterfield 8*, constitutes his only attempt to under-

stand a psychopathic type. By and large, the "roundest" character that he has invented so far is weak, attractive, unheroic Julian English, in *Appointment in Samarra*, whose suicide and its aftermath occasion O'Hara's most moving writing. Unlike others of his characters who suffer death, Julian is given a number of convincing reasons for committing suicide, and some of these go deep: parent-child hostilities; the family "taint," beginning with his grandfather's embezzlement of bank funds; Julian's guilt at being an aristocrat in a class-conscious town; his feeling of estrangement from both the Irish Catholics and the Pennsylvania Dutch; his guilt over an early affair with Mary, a Polish "patch" girl; the revelation that his cousin has hated him all these years; his final recognition of his own unchanging immaturity in relation to his wife. In his last frenzy, Julian magnifies all these to the stature of delusions (as the last, ironic pages of the book reveal); and they, rather than the many external and immediate difficulties described in the events of the plot, are what drive him to his death.

O'Hara seems to choose most of his characters, therefore, from a feeling of the decay of human nature, whether found in cities or town, among rich or poor. New York people are quite as wicked as those in Gibbsville. Riches and education (the education has always been a poor one) never give them resources against being bored, hurt, or desperate. Poverty, for its part, makes one an unattractive malcontent, a user, merely, of more subtle and whining strategies of mean conduct than those available to the wealthy. That people of the sort that O'Hara describes do exist is true, but that they should constitute almost the whole population of

his created world suggests severe limitations in his view of life. It is a matter of proportion.

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In view of O'Hara's lopsided interpretation of human nature, it is not surprising to find narrowness in his treatment of the larger themes of human life, such as love, death, and conflict. Love, for him, is nothing better than sterile competition between men and women. In Hemingway love may be impossibly romantic and intense, but it is a force for good as far as the individual is concerned and translates him to a special plane. In O'Hara, love is sex, and sex leads to trouble. It is not the mark of the individualist, that which enables Hemingway's lovers to free themselves from the war and the world. Instead, it is something that entraps and inhibits, and its logical conclusion is ennui or death. The beginning of marriage is the end of love. O'Hara sees private life as a jungle, and for that reason, his studies of marriage are jaundiced in the extreme. We see people long divorced, just getting divorced, separated, adulterous, trapped in tired wedlock, all at each other's throats. But no picture of a reasonably happy marriage anywhere.

All of O'Hara's novels except *A Rage to Live* end with a death, and all the deaths are violent and accidental. Death is a hard spasm at the end; it is not the prelude to anything. No deaths are accompanied by purgation or understanding or by a sense of ceremonial significance, as in Hemingway. With O'Hara, as with many writers of the hardboiled school, death seems to be a technical recourse for bringing to a conclusion the tangled situational skeins which the author cannot resolve by de-

ductions from character. Gratuitous deaths (as in *Butterfield 8*) are common in O'Hara and do not encourage us to believe that the author has much faith in his own understanding of motivation, or much interest in that notion which assigns to man some dignity and some power of choice—the notion that character is fate. Or death may serve as a destroyer of certain types of moods thought undesirable among tough writers: it is a means of cutting off any sentimentality or optimism which may have written themselves into the story. And finally, the ignobleness of the death may act as an ultimate comment on the wretched, wanton nature of the world and life. O'Hara's *The Farmer's Hotel* is a convincing instance of all these attitudes.

Except for the wrenchings which accompany death, violent conflict is remarkable by its absence from O'Hara's writing. Fights, wars, rapes, and natural and social calamities are the staple of Cain and Hemingway, but O'Hara's soldiers have done their fighting at the front and are on leave to try their luck at unresisted seduction. Everywhere there is conflict, but chiefly of a smaller sort, sometimes buried and unadmitted, arising from a variety of situations: useless luncheon gab among women who talk around the fact that they dislike each other; the embarrassed, mawkish awakening to sex; business rivalries; Hollywood career colliding with career; native versus summer folk at a resort village; people on their way up, and others on their way down; teacher versus students; the husband on the make; the wife seeking, also, to mitigate a tiresome monogamy by adultery; the obnoxious drinker or Don Juan at a party; school-tie stuffiness. For O'Hara, these conflicts—

clever in their single-moment depiction—constitute most of what there is to life. What is more important, such clashes are never resolved by reason, humor, love, or insight.

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O'Hara's stories and novels employ a formal technique which is economical to the point of being starved. Except for "The Doctor's Son," "Walter T. Carriman" (probably O'Hara's most brilliant story), and a few other pieces, O'Hara has never written a short story in the traditional form—that is, with beginning, middle, and end, with careful delineation and painstaking development of character, with full description of background, and with a specifically clear intellectual or aesthetic purpose behind it. O'Hara confines himself, especially in his earliest collection of short stories, to writing short and choppy sketches of about a thousand words apiece. The chief requisites for this type of fiction are a good ear for dialog and perhaps a good eye, and in such fragments, significance is the last characteristic likely to be inherent.

An O'Hara sketch is built around a single-moment technique. One human being—or perhaps two—is caught in one revelatory scene, either a crisis or, more often, a seemingly tensionless and insignificant pinpoint of time. His life is sliced at both ends, he exists only inside the moment, and there is no attempt at exposition. Such a sketch consists, fundamentally, of a dialog or monolog about a situation—it is as skeletal a technique as that. Commentary, description, and analysis are cut to the bone. In most of these sketches, O'Hara has so unnecessarily abrogated the legitimate right of the

artist to fullness of effect and commentary that his characters are hardly oriented in time, place, and idea.

Critics have often complained about the construction of O'Hara's novels; a common impression, apparently, has been one of looseness, tag ends, and extraneous characterizations. His longer works do suggest a series of sketches thrown together in accordance with a too simple principle of unity. *Appointment in Samarra*, *Butterfield 8*, and *The Farmer's Hotel* create an assorted group of characters, at great distance from one another, and then try to draw them together gradually as the story proceeds. This type of organization is most plausible and least obtrusive in *Appointment in Samarra*, where the somewhat loose arrangement is saved by a clever time technique and by a correctly proportioned use of flashbacks and chapter lengths, so that we are never too long away from the central issues of the book. The construction in time is compact and limited, and expands out from the Christmas holiday weekend which includes all the present events. *Hope of Heaven* and *A Rage to Live*, on the other hand, follow chronology—that is, all of the important events are told in present, acting time, in a straight line, interrupted by various devices for fulfilling the requirements of exposition and introspection. This scheme is more orthodox than the compressed construction which has just been mentioned, and which is ultimately merely a more complicated version of the single-moment principle. *A Rage to Live* is a long and tedious example of straightline plotting, following a time sequence of about fifty years, and being very loosely organized in a series of dramatic scenes, interspersed with flashbacks, irksome family

histories, sampling spot shots, and extraneous characters.

In all of his work, O'Hara commands a dazzling variety of narrator-devices and points-of-view, and is especially adroit at letterwriting devices, as in *Pal Joey*, and first person techniques. He can imitate convincingly a great variety of persons, although his powers of identification are confined to surface phenomena, chiefly dialog. His sensory impressions are those of the ear only; touch, smell, and taste are blocked off, and even visually, his writings are uninteresting. Nature does not concern him, and he rarely describes natural objects or landscapes. Thus it is that his characters have no "sense of the land," no feel of belonging to a locale, except for a fleeting scene given to Julian English, and Grace Tate's attachment to her farm outside of Harrisburg. He does not even bother with a physical description of people or objects. He makes little use of color, shading, perspective, contrast and balance. Except perhaps in *A Rage to Live*, his backgrounds—even city backgrounds—are written in very rapidly and vaguely, with objects being described, not meticulously, but by the plainest generic noun. Like Hemingway, O'Hara "names things," but without Hemingway's peculiar connotative power. He obviously has no faith in symbolism, allegory, or "evocative" techniques, and one supposes that he would find them "arty."

O'Hara's dialog is universally praised, and it is, not improbably, the most lifelike that any American has so far written. That is not quite the same as to say that it is the *best* that has been written, for dialog is to be considered in relation to the whole of the short story or novel. Such considera-

tion will reveal O'Hara's disproportionate dependence upon dialog and his somewhat unselective rendering of any line which he might defend by saying that he had actually overheard it. Characterization and the story line are expressed almost entirely through dialog. Indeed, it might not be too far amiss to say that he, quite literally, writes nothing except dialog, for even his paragraphs of description and background sound like conversation. This is equally true of his embarrassing "Forewords" and book reviews.

In style, therefore, O'Hara's search is entirely for the cliché. Fitzgerald and Nathanael West—perhaps most modern novelists—also search for the cliché, but only in their dialog; their descriptive, narrative and transitional passages show an intense hunt for the exclusive and the metaphoric. Actually, O'Hara's laconic, gritty style is inflexibly bound to the colloquial, the monosyllabic, the literal, and the unpoetic.

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The prospects for O'Hara in the future are—more of the same. His technique has not shown any fundamental alteration in his last two novels, and he seems as incapable as ever of seeing man as a whole. He is still caught up in the transitory and ephemeral, perhaps because, like many of the hardboiled writers, he will allow himself craft, but not art. Hence, he fosters a deliberate anti-intellectualism and unartyness; and they, in turn, exert a restriction upon idea, feeling, and form. In some writers an otherwise healthy anti-aestheticism has a tendency to become an obsession which debilitates the imagination and understanding, and is quite as attitudinized as extreme

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# A Method for Teaching Spelling to a Group of Seriously Retarded Students

RALPH M. WILLIAMS

THE TEACHING of spelling to a group of poor spellers is actually more difficult than teaching one poor speller, and yet for most teachers at any level it is necessary to find some way of dealing with the majority of the bad spellers as a group. The procedure which I am about to describe is primarily the result of four years of experimenting with groups at Trinity College. During these four years I have given every freshman entering Trinity the standardized *Lincoln Diagnostic Spelling Test* (12). The results seem to justify the wide-spread feeling among college teachers that the spelling of college students has deteriorated since World War II. The norms for this test were made in 1939; during the years in which I gave it (1949-52), only one third of the carefully selected group entering Trinity could meet the end-of-the-year median for the twelfth grade, and twelve per cent could not

meet the end-of-the-year median for the eighth grade. This twelve per cent were required to attend a "Spelling Clinic" which I conducted and in which many of these methods were evolved (with much help from outside, as my bibliography shows). They may all, I think, be easily adapted to retarded spellers in secondary schools—and to working with individuals when that is possible.

I should say something more about the testing. The more I deal with different spelling tests, the less important I think it is which test is used, as long as a sufficient number of words is used and they are of sufficient difficulty to induce the student to make a goodly number of errors, for the errors are most revealing. The purpose of the testing is not merely to find bad spellers, but to determine which ones can profit from group work, and which ones will need individual attention. For example, the student who is an extreme case of lack of cerebral dominance will reveal himself on any test by a large percentage of reversals in his mistakes. And such a student probably will need more time than my proposed course of study allows to learn and be able to apply the phonetic generalizations employed; he will need individual tutoring in phonics and spelling. Similarly, special, individualized attention will be necessary for students with defects in hearing or vision that seem to be affecting

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Last year Professor Williams held a Faculty Fellowship from the Ford Foundation's Fund for the Advancement of Education and spent the year studying the teaching of remedial reading, an interest growing out of his teaching of "remedial spelling" at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, where he is a member of the department of English.

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their spelling. In trying to deal adequately with individual differences, teachers will always find a few who have to be dealt with individually. My group program offers no panacea for solving their problems.

My thinking on this problem has been guided by two main premises. The first is that, just as the remedial reader is a student whom the conventional methods of teaching have failed to teach to read, so the retarded speller is a student whom the usual methods have not taught to spell. This means that for a group of the sort I have been dealing with (four years or more retarded), I am strongly opposed to the teaching of spelling from lists of words such as are found in most spelling books today. These are generally based on the frequency with which a word is used, but as they are not adapted to the present vocabulary and immediate needs of the student who is retarded, he can rarely see any rhyme or reason to them, and the study of them becomes poorly motivated rote memory work. The main part of this paper will be an attempt to show a method which I believe has reason as well as rhyme.

This means, of course, that the debate between the *test-study* and *study-test* methods of teaching spelling has little pertinence in a discussion of what to do with retarded spellers, for both methods pre-suppose a list to study or test with.

My second premise follows somewhat from the first. Students who have been bad spellers for any length of time are emotionally "blocked" in varying degrees. They take the attitude either that they were born poor spellers and can't do anything about it, or they could spell if they wanted to. The longer this attitude persists the harder

it is to overcome, for spelling does not have the obvious practical value of reading. Underneath, however, not one of them really likes not being able to spell (17), and consequently I do as many things as I can to make them believe in themselves as spellers and to make spelling seem desirable and possible to them. The spelling notebook, which I shall discuss later, is the most obvious example. A notebook too often degenerates into a list of words which the student can *not* spell; I try to turn it into a combined guide to better spelling and list of words he *can* spell.

To begin with, I find it usually proves comforting to these students to have it pointed out to them that, so far as spelling is concerned, all words fall into three groups:

1. Phonetic words. This, the largest group, doesn't really need to be studied at all.
2. Non-phonetic words which are covered by spelling generalizations and so can be learned by groups.
3. The "demons". These make up the smallest group and are the only ones which need to be studied individually.

In practice, of course, the first group cannot be ignored with these retarded spellers. I have yet to find a speller retarded four years or more who had ever been taught any phonics or who, if he had, had remembered any of it. So what I do is to combine phonic generalizations with spelling generalizations. And it is here that the spelling notebook enters and becomes the heart of the spelling program. On the last page I do have the students "fight the fire where it is hottest" and list the words which they have misspelled in papers and

are to study, like the demons, individually by a method to be described later. The first page is a title page. Thereafter, every two-page spread, as the notebook lies open, is devoted to one sound and its phonograms and pertinent generalizations, *and a list of illustrative words which the student is sure he can spell.* As these lists grow and greatly exceed the negative list at the back of the book, the student develops a better attitude toward spelling.

We begin the notebook with the ten sounds and letters which are perfectly phonetic (*b, h, l, m, n, p, r, t, v, w*). With these I introduce the short sounds for the vowels *a* and *o*, because they are as regularly represented by one letter as are any of the vowels. With these twelve letters we can begin to put words in the notebooks and even see something of the rhyming groups which prove so useful in this type of teaching—for example, *bat, hat, mat, pat, rat, vat; or hot, lot, not, pot, rot; and bop, hop, lop, mop, pop, plop, top.*

We next move on to the sounds represented by two different phonograms. (I should note that I follow the practice of the dictionary and use italics, i.e., underlining, when referring to phonograms, and parentheses around a phonogram to refer to its most familiar sound.) I usually begin with (*ch*) as it has only two phonograms and illustrates some fundamental principles very well. There is always a danger in trying to teach too much at a time to these retarded spellers, so I find this a good lesson to be leisurely about. I do not mention at this time the other sounds which the phonogram *ch* may represent, but I do try to bring out the facts that the position of a sound in its syllable may affect its spelling, and that one-syllable words often

behave differently from longer words.

With (*ch*) I begin by making the sound itself several times and having the class repeat it. Then, by a method I have found to be much like Gray's (9) system of substitution, I have them go back to the rhyming families they have already begun, and add, where possible, words beginning with *ch; chat, chap, and chop*, for example. I then write on the board for them five and six words employing letters they know except for the phonogram *tch*:

batch	patch	notch
match	botch	blotch
latch		

I ask them to pronounce these words, and by questioning, have them point out that *tch* is another phonogram for (*ch*). I then ask them to see if they can figure out when to use *tch* by looking at these words which I write on the board:

ranch	peach	attach
march	teach	ostrich
porch	pouch	sandwich

They arrive ultimately at the generalization that *tch* is used only at the end of words of one syllable following a single vowel (i.e., a short vowel). Some time must here be taken up discussing prefixes and suffixes, pointing out that so far as the rule for *tch* is concerned, they have no effect: *bewitch* keeps the *tch* of *witch*, and *patching* and *patched*, of *patch*.

With (*ch*), or whatever sound is first introduced that is regularly represented by two or more phonograms, the notebook first has to be ruled into columns. With (*ch*), for example, there should be a column for (*ch*) when first in the word or syllable, another for (*ch*) after a consonant in one-syllable

words, one for (ch) after long vowels (usually diphthongs) in one-syllable words ending in (ch), one for words with *tch*, and finally one for exceptions to the generalization about *tch*, which should be written across the bottom of the page which contains the *tch* column. The column of exceptions provides the group of demons to be mastered, and those for *tch* are good to begin with, psychologically, as they are all one-syllable words and not too hard to master. The commonest are: *much, rich, such, and which.*

I dislike using illustrations with sounds and letters which the students have not already included in their notebook, but I have yet to discover an order of presentation which will avoid this difficulty completely (I have never used the same order twice myself, so that the one given here is a suggestion only). For this reason, I find it an advantage to introduce the rest of the short vowels fairly rapidly at this point: (ě) makes a good one to take up next, with columns in the notebook for rhyming families with just *e* (*bet, let, met, pet, wet*, for example), and the group of around forty words (mostly quite common) with *ea*. With words which are not likely to cause trouble, it does not matter much where they are placed in the notebook; others should be listed on the page for its "trouble spot." Unless it has more than one trouble spot, a word should be included in the front part of the notebook only once—and then only when the student is sure he can spell it. Words with *ea* representing (ě),—*bear, head, wealth, breath*, etc.—for example, should go on the pages for (ě) in general. For an inexperienced teacher, Gates's (6) analysis of the trouble spots in 3876 words will be helpful in deciding where

words should go. And for teachers desiring word lists illustrating specific sounds or phonograms, the lists in Gillingham (8) and Akin (1) are almost indispensable.

The page for short (i) will include columns for *i, ie*, and *ey*. The two latter usually occur at the *end* of words when sounded (i), but the fact that they may represent other sounds when in this position will be confusing until the students understand something about accent, a topic which may well be introduced at this point. (ü) will have columns for *u* and *o*. An explanation of the latter as an outgrowth of medieval penmanship is helpful, and usually proves interesting to a class.

To continue with the consonants, I have found (k) a good one. The generalization for the use of *ck* exactly parallels that for *tch*; the use of *ch* for (k) is a natural sequel to the use of *ch* for (ch), and the generalizations for when to use *c* and when to use *k* are fairly stable. I can not decide, however, whether it is best to go on then to (s) and thus take up the other sound commonly represented by *c*, or to take up (j); the generalization for *dge* as a phonogram for (j) is parallel to those for *ck* and *tch*, and *g* represents (j) under the same conditions that *c* represents (s), although the generalizations for *g* are not so reliable as for *c*. In any case, these three sounds, (k), (j), and (s), along with (g), should be introduced fairly early.

I need not go into further detail about the order in which the various sounds are to be taken up; any sequence which I have followed is in any case a modification of the order suggested by Miss Gillingham (8). I believe in introducing the five short vowels sooner than she does, but agree

in postponing the long vowels to the end. The diphthongs in particular are likely to be troublesome, although there are many useful generalizations (some of which even Miss Gillingham misses) to guide the unfortunate speller in making a choice. Another arrangement of Miss Gillingham's material may be found in the *Spelling Workbook* by Mildred B. Plunkett (16), which is, however, a disappointing performance in that it does not take full advantage of all the helpful material provided by Miss Gillingham. A more recent and complete adaptation of Miss Gillingham's material is *A Spelling Curriculum*, by Sally B. Childs (2).

I cannot emphasize enough, however, the importance of presenting the generalizations inductively, as Dolch suggests (2). It takes longer to present words and have the class formulate the generalization than to dictate it to begin with, but in the end the class remembers it better and is able to apply it better for having discovered it for themselves. And even though not all the generalizations are equally valuable (the one about *tch*, for example, helps with only one word on the Jones (10) list, *sandwich*), the regular practice of making these generalizations creates an attitude of mind, a thoughtfulness about and consciousness of spelling, that is well worth the time spent in developing it. The chief argument against generalizations and rules has been that the students learn them and then never apply them. The explanation of this fact lies, I think, in the way the rules were presented; if they are inductively presented, and the mind of the student is trained in the formulating of them through much practice, he will come to apply them easily and naturally.

The building of the notebook, with

its generalizations and lists, should not be allowed to occupy all the time of each class period, however. A little time should be saved for review. With notebooks closed, the class may be asked not only what phonograms represent a sound already discussed, but what sounds any one phonogram may represent. Practice should be provided in distinguishing between short vowels, especially in unaccented syllables. And very early there should be practice in syllabication. In dealing with spellers four years retarded one has a very different problem from the initial teaching of word analysis, and it is a distinct disadvantage to wait until the end of the program to take up syllabication as Gray (9) does in his plan for introducing word analysis in the early grades. And finally, a little time at each session should be devoted to the study of demons. These should be analyzed carefully for their trouble spots, and no demon should be brought into class until all the sounds in it have been discussed. For example, *height* is, I believe, the only exception to the generalization that *ei* followed by *gh* always says (ā). I would include this in the column of exceptions on the pages for (ā), rather than as an exotic form on the pages for (i), but I would not bring it up until both (ā) and (i) had been discussed in class.

The method for studying these special words should emphasize the coordination of the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. The commonest criticism of conventional methods of teaching spelling is that they tend to concentrate on only one of these approaches. I have adapted for group use a method well known for individual study. The group looks at the word being studied (either written on the board or before them in

print) for a minute silently. I try to emphasize studying it from left to right, and breaking it down into syllables if it is polysyllabic. Then, still looking at the word, the students spell it aloud in unison and slowly enough to allow themselves to "write" each letter in the air as they say it. In working in this way with a group the teacher obviously has to be the leader of the chorus and set the pace. After they have done this twice (oftener if it is a particularly long or difficult word), the word is erased from the board or covered up, and they again spell it in unison orally, but this time from memory and writing each letter on a strip of unruled paper simultaneously with saying it. To emphasize the kinesthetic impression of the act of writing, I have them look out the window as they write. When they finish the word, they compare their version with a correct copy, and if they have made a mistake, make a mental note of what it was. They then turn under the top of the strip of paper, hiding their previous version, and repeat the process, again spelling it aloud simultaneously with the writing and again until everyone has done it correctly three times in succession.

This classroom procedure takes less time to use than to describe. And I have found it very effective. When I first began to use it, I tried an experiment to test its efficacy. I taught two words in this manner at each class session until we had taken up ten words. Meanwhile I had given out a list of fifty words to be studied outside of class. I then gave an "unannounced quiz," containing the ten words studied in class and ten of those supposedly studied outside. No one misspelled more than one of the specially studied words, and many got all ten correct;

the class average was five for the other ten words, and no one achieved a perfect score. It was such a nice object lesson that I have done the same thing every year since then, giving out the first hundred words on the Jones (10) list for outside study. The students are supposed to adapt this classroom method of study to private study of words they have themselves misspelled, and to the Jones list, which is based on words actually misspelled by college freshmen and therefore seems to be a list with some reason to it.

Another classroom procedure which I have experimented with and found rewarding is the study of rhyming families. For example, take the words which end in (e)d: *field, shield, wield, and yield* are eye rhymes as well as ear rhymes, and can be studied and learned as a group; all the other words in this rhyming group are preterits or past participles of verbs ending in *eal* (*healed, sealed, concealed, etc.*), and they too can be learned as a group.

Thus far I have sketched my general plan for teaching spelling to the retarded spellers. It has not always been successful; some students who needed individual attention had to come to the group meetings because I had no time for individual tutoring; some others I failed to motivate properly, and they did not apply themselves. But in a generous majority of the cases this method has succeeded in making better spellers out of the students, and they were able, at the end of the year, to come back and take a test on another form of the Lincoln test and make a score of 78 out of 100 (end-of-the-year median for the twelfth grade) or better.

Finally, I should say something about the so-called rules of spelling. I introduce most of them at what seem to me

to be appropriate points, and have them recorded at the end of the notebook, just before the list of the student's own misspellings, as most of the rules involve more than one sound. I try to be inductive in my presentation of rules as well as of generalizations. For example, the rule for doubling the final consonant before a suffix beginning with a vowel I introduce with the discussion of the effect of a final silent *e* on the preceding vowel (a consonant intervening), which of course explains the doubling of the final consonant. The rule for "i before e" I omit, as causing more confusion than help. The diphthong *ie* is much commoner than *ei*, and so I treat each one separately. The three sounds represented by *ie* all have good generalizations distinguishing them. The generalizations for the sounds represented by *ei* are not so good, but the exceptions are still fewer than with the old rule of "i before e." Miss Gillingham (8) lists twenty very useful rules, many of which are ignored by most spelling books, and Robie (17) provides a group of fifteen.

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*(Continued on page 512)*

# A Modern Odyssey

## *Observations on English Teaching in Twenty-six Colleges*

EDITH A. WRAY

AS ONE of the educational projects connected with the sesqui-centennial celebration of Ohio University during 1954, a study of English departments in twenty-six selected colleges and universities in the South and East was made in an attempt to discover new ideas and possible innovations in college English teaching. It was my privilege to be sent on this university-sponsored mission, from February through May, 1954, to bring back helpful information to my university.

The schools chosen represent various types of institutions with different problems and aims.<sup>1</sup> State universities—large and small, privately endowed

schools, women's colleges, men's colleges, coeducational institutions, professional schools with liberal arts leanings, and church-supported schools—all must teach English. Coming into contact with English professors as well as with students, seeing them together in classes, in preceptorial groups, in seminars, and in conferences gave me the opportunity, as no study of college catalogues could, to see a whole performance and to sense aims and end results. I lived on or near college campuses in the schools visited and stayed long enough to be sure of my impressions and conclusions. A summary of what I observed follows.

### *Admission Requirements*

The following table indicates the variations in admission requirements in the schools I visited:

	<i>Schools</i>
1. Admission of all applicants from accredited high schools	3
2. Admission of applicants from upper three-fifths or upper half of high school graduating classes from accredited high schools.	7
3. Admission of applicants who have passed College Board examinations and have satisfied college admissions officers	12
4. Admission of applicants who have passed examinations given by college of student's choice	4

In schools which have strict entrance screening, remedial English classes do not exist. The quality of the written and oral work in freshman and sopho-

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more classes indicates that students who have been admitted are really thinking and are profiting by college-level instruction.

The schools which now admit all applicants from accredited high schools are looking to the General College with a two-year terminal program as the answer for students of low scholarship.

### *Freshman English*

The pattern of freshman English indicates a great deal of experimentation in an effort to meet individual student needs. The following table suggests these differences:

	Schools
1. Composition and rhetoric, with readings for ideas	9
2. Composition and rhetoric, with no readings	3
3. Composition and rhetoric, with no readings (one semester)	1
4. A literature course substituted for composition	4
5. Two freshman courses, one a composition course; one a humanities course <sup>2</sup>	3
6. Several courses offered to meet needs of students with different majors <sup>3</sup>	3
7. A communications course	2
8. An elective literature course, if desired <sup>4</sup>	1

In all of the courses, however, a great deal of writing is done, whether it stems from material taken from the student's own experience or from critical analysis of books in an ambitious

<sup>2</sup> Columbia College, Harvard and Radcliffe have choices of several humanities courses and a half course in English composition.

<sup>3</sup> Carnegie Technological Institute has one course for engineers, one for home economists, and one for fine arts majors. Yale has a special course for engineers. Brooklyn College has two programs with a different set-up for two freshman English courses.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Lawrence College allows a student to take one of three elementary literature courses if she so desires.

reading program. Students are judged on the basis of ideas as well as expression.

Classes vary in size from several hundred in the Harvard and Radcliffe humanities courses (divided into sections for discussions) to three in the Haverford freshman discussion groups. The average size of classes in other colleges is from fifteen to twenty-five students.

In several colleges, the composition course is broken at the end of the first semester to resume at the beginning of the fourth semester.<sup>5</sup> In the second part of the course, the student has had some experience in reading and in forming judgments with the result that his writing is more mature than in the first semester.

Informal discussion in small classes is an important part of most freshman courses. In Haverford, for example, all freshmen take a year-course called Reading and Writing on Human Values with two class meetings in groups of about twenty, consisting largely of discussions leading to writing. A tutorial section of three students and an instructor meet for a third class hour weekly to read and judge student papers; rigorous criticism results. Swarthmore freshman classes of ten or twelve discuss reading and then hand in papers at the next class meeting on some idea in the reading, suggested by class discussion. Undergraduate preceptorial groups at Princeton, consisting of six to eight students and a professor, meet around a table and talk informally of their reading and writing.

In other schools different types of

<sup>5</sup> Hunter College and Brooklyn College favor this plan. A year's survey course is taken in the second and third semesters.

sections are set up to meet particular needs of freshmen. By means of entrance tests, divisions are made for slow readers, the average student and the high IQ's. At the University of Virginia, for example, only one honors section for the whole freshman class is provided for the very high IQ's, with extensive reading and writing of a high order. At Simmons College, particular attention is given to the students who rate high on the English entrance tests; in a special four-hour year's course, students in classes of fifteen to twenty are guided in critical writing, based on an extensive reading list. At Yale, technical students, who have only one year of required English, are given a basic course called Terminal English, which not only informs them, but stimulates them in original thinking and precise writing.

Remedial English is offered in ten of the twenty-six colleges; in most of these schools a student is sent back for remedial English if he fails to do creditable writing in the regular classes. The check on the student's manner of writing is often the English proficiency test, given in the sophomore or junior year.<sup>6</sup> In several schools, passing such a test is a requirement for graduation.<sup>7</sup>

Stimulation of thought through wide reading and discussion, followed by a student's written reaction to what he has read and discussed, is the base upon which most of the freshman work which I observed is built.

#### *Sophomore Literature*

Sophomore literature courses are

\* Pennsylvania State University gives the test at the end of the sophomore year, except for the special proficiency test for engineers, given in the junior year. Duke University has the test at the beginning of the junior year.

<sup>7</sup> Duke, Pennsylvania State, Hunter.

undergoing marked experimentation, away from the old survey pattern. The following table indicates a great disparity of ideas:

#### *Schools*

1. A one-semester great masters course <sup>8</sup>	4
2. No sophomore literature course	3
3. A choice between an introduction to literature and a great masters' course	2
4. A choice between an introduction to literature and a survey course	2
5. A humanities course	4
6. A types course	1
7. A great figure course	1
8. A survey course	4
9. A one-semester survey course <sup>9</sup>	1
10. American literature and English literature <sup>10</sup>	1
11. An experimental course in reading <sup>11</sup>	1

Since many professors agree that a survey course in English literature has become too unwieldy for a year's course, various plans to cut down the number of writers studied has resulted in great masters, types, or introduction-to-literature courses. In most schools sophomore literature is not required, except for English majors. In schools with a choice of courses, an introduction to literature is recommended for non-majors.

Various experiments now in operation are set up to create student interest

\* The Woman's College of the University of North Carolina gives a required course in Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton for one semester.

<sup>8</sup> Bryn Mawr College gives a survey from the beginnings to the middle of the eighteenth century.

<sup>9</sup> Princeton gives one semester of American literature and one semester of English literature of the last one hundred years.

<sup>10</sup> The Interpretation of Literature course at Wellesley calls for "a close reading and critical evaluation of poetry and fiction" [see catalogue]. A survey course is offered for English majors, although not required. English majors also have a program of independent reading, with no guidance given during the reading.

and to lead the student from less difficult to more difficult materials. One such course consists of modern short stories, followed by Chaucer stories; modern drama, followed by Shakespearean plays; modern poetry, followed by Elizabethan and seventeenth century lyrics; and modern novels, followed by eighteenth century novels.<sup>12</sup> Another such course consists of nineteenth and twentieth century writers the first semester and writers of earlier centuries the second semester.<sup>13</sup>

Two criteria seem to guide professors who set up sophomore courses: 1. What is the most inspired thinking from writers of the past and present which can be used for reading and discussion? 2. What literature will catch fire in the student's mind to stimulate his own thinking? With these two criteria as guides, the choices may be readings from the past or the present. Chronology is less important than an awakening of the thinking process—the all important goal.

#### *English Major*

With the exception of three schools which offer no English major, all of the others I visited concentrate on major work during the junior and senior years. Five schools allow the students to make their own choices of courses, guided by a tutor or counselor. The others have a spread of required courses, distributed among period, types, and big figure courses—often a course in the history of the language—and electives. Increasing stress on American literature is noticeable.<sup>14</sup> Four to six year courses in the major field plus supplementary readings in

<sup>12</sup> The University of Virginia.

<sup>13</sup> Carnegie Technological Institute.

<sup>14</sup> Most schools require for majors at least one year-course in the American field.

fields in which the student is weak constitute the average requirements.

Honors work is stressed in many schools to give superior students an opportunity to work in small groups with a professor or to work individually with a preceptor or tutor. For example, the Swarthmore honors plan calls for seminars of seven students; the Princeton, for preceptorial sections of six students. At Harvard and Radcliffe an honors major works individually with a tutor.

Eleven of the twenty-six schools require a comprehensive examination at the end of the senior year. In one school the honors examinations are prepared by professors from other universities and graded by them.<sup>15</sup> In several of these schools orals follow the written examinations as a final test for high or highest honors.<sup>16</sup>

In a few schools a senior thesis may be substituted for a course, if a student shows promise in research. Special courses may prepare the student for a senior essay or a senior thesis.<sup>17</sup>

In all of these patterns there is an increasing emphasis on student choices and interests with opportunities for close supervision and criticism by sympathetic professors and tutors, who stimulate the undergraduate to realize his latent powers. Increased student initiative thus fosters not only a well-rounded major program, but it also encourages mature judgment and unquestionably widens student horizons in several related fields.

#### *Extracurricular Activities*

Extracurricular activities in English in several schools which I visited give

<sup>15</sup> Swarthmore.

<sup>16</sup> Swarthmore, Haverford.

<sup>17</sup> Yale, Princeton, Wellesley.

added impetus to student interest. For instance, at the University of North Carolina, the Folklore Club, made up largely of English majors, sponsors speakers to talk on American folklore. At Pennsylvania State University, the Belles Lettres Club holds monthly meetings at which student and faculty papers are read and discussed. Students in English at Flora Macdonald College put out a quarterly magazine, *The Pine and the Thistle*, with creative writing from the classroom. Inasmuch as this college is named for the Scottish heroine who saved Bonny Prince Charley, the Scottish Society of America has taken an interest in the magazine which circulates among a wide group of supporters. At Brooklyn College from the twenty sections of the Shakespeare course, a Shakespeare Club has been formed with regular programs by such speakers as Margaret Webster and Marquette Chute, who contribute their services. The club takes over Shakespearean performances in New York City and sells every ticket. The proceeds go to build up a scholarship to send students to the summer Stratford (England) Institute to study Shakespeare; four such students have gone. The Woman's College of the University of North Carolina, through interested students in the humanities, rents framed pictures—prints of the masters—available for student rooms during the school year. As students and instructors told me of their achievements, I sensed a genuine pride and an interest beyond the classroom.

### Conclusions

I am more than ever convinced that our educational world is in a state of transition from the old order to the new—from the Darwinian world to the atomic world, as one professor sug-

gested. There is a feeling on the part of teachers and students alike that since the present age of danger happens to be our world, we must meet it and live it as courageously as possible.

Lock-stepping of the past is gone. The majority of the schools I visited gave complete freedom to the instructors to present material which they could believe in as the best reading to stimulate young minds to an understanding in their own thought processes. Procedures vary, but I felt always that the trained mind of the instructor was at the controls—for time is too precious to moulder in too much futile discussion by the groping student, without frequent stimulating questions from the experienced person. Discussion—yes, but instructor controlled.

More and more English staffs are meeting students with the kind of reading that comes from the student's world of today. But at the same time, there is a feeling that the great books of the past must be read—English, American, and European and Asiatic in translation. The stress is on the *mind* of man wherever and whenever he may have lived, for man of the past has a contribution to the thinking of the present.

Our language is changing. In many schools, the History of the Language is now a requirement, with stress on the changing patterns in our twentieth century world. Words are studied to suggest meaning of meanings—and preciseness for the complexities of modern international implications.

Again I believe that the emphasis is on the training of the kinds of minds that will benefit from liberal education. The idea that because I pay taxes for education my son or daughter must go to the university and come out with a

baccalaureate degree is being recognized more and more as fallacious. Do the best you can for the student who comes, but don't feel that all is lost if some fall by the wayside.

The idea of the General College or the two-year terminal course is growing, especially for the students who cannot measure up to the AB degree. Train the leaders to give their greatest service to society, and when there must be a choice between giving time to the unfit or to the fit, give the advantage to the ones who will profit from it. Such seems to be the idea of many of our educators. Even in state-supported or city colleges, there is a tendency to screen, and in some schools not to admit, the very low graduates from high school whose aptitudes do not warrant

four years spent in the liberal arts. Those preparing to be teachers should also be screened, and those with low marks should not be carried on into practice teaching or certification. Too much is at stake for the public school students to be taught by the unfit.

The miracle of teaching in the last analysis is the exchange of ideas between two minds—the instructor's and the student's. I have talked with a great number of teachers of English. I have seen them teach, and I have seen students in the classroom stirred to new ideas and to assurance that their ideas, timidly presented, amounted to something after all. These teachers suggested in many ways that the truth was what all were seeking for their soul's satisfaction and for the benefit of all.

### *Spelling for Retarded Students—[Continued from page 506]*

A New Goal, A New Method, A New Product," *The ABC Language Arts Bulletin*, Vol. VI, No. 1, N.Y. American Book Co., 1954.

A vigorous statement of a conventional attitude toward spelling, not at all constructive for remedial spelling.

14. Morrison, J. Cayce, and McCall, William A., *Morrison-McCall Spelling Scale*, Yonkers, N.Y.: World Book Co., 1923.

Eight comparable spelling tests of fifty words each, with norms. Very useful for grades 1-8 or with retarded spellers.

15. O'Connor, Johnson, *English Vocabulary Test, and Administration of Vocabulary Tests*. Hoboken, N.J.: Human Engineering Laboratory, 1939.

Worksample 95 is designed for senior high school and college. The norms seem too high to me, but I am judging from only one experience with it.

16. Plunket, Mildred B., *A Spelling Workbook Emphasizing Rules and Generalizations for Corrective Drill*. Cambridge, Mass.: Mrs. Frank R. Plunket, 32 Avon Street, 1949.

Based on Miss Gillingham's (8) material, but only a sampling. Carelessly lithographed.

17. Robie, Everett E., *Spelling By Rule and Reason*, Stamford, Conn.: Everett E. Robie, The Glenbrook Schools [no date]. Reprinted from *The Grade Teacher* for June, 1930.

An excellent little pamphlet, well worth the ten cents it costs.

18. *Toward Better Spelling*, Bulletin 2 of the Communications Steering Committee of the Newton (Mass.) Public Schools.

A very practical book, full of good exercises and drills with which to vary the spelling program. Many can be used in a remedial group.

# The Nature of Our Grammar

EDWARD L. ANDERSON

THE literature about "grammar," and the teaching of it, are currently in a state of considerable confusion. On the one hand there are many English teachers whose ideas about the terminology of grammar and about "correctness" in matters of sentence structure and word choice were largely acquired by study in textbooks of formal grammar based on eighteenth and nineteenth century notions of these matters, and who have had these ideas reinforced by years of teaching from school or college texts which, in turn, have been principally restatements of these views of English syntax and other matters of usage. On the other hand, is a growing body of linguists and descriptive grammarians in American colleges and universities, and of teachers on various levels who have taken courses from these scholars or read their books and articles, all of whom are aware of certain false assumptions about the structure of the English language made by the eighteenth and nineteenth century grammar writers, and of the false premises on which much of what is prescribed and proscribed in conventional grammars is predicated.

Generally speaking, traditional or formal grammars have made these assumptions about the nature of our language: (1) that the structure of English is basically akin to the structure of a highly inflected language like Latin; (2) that the terminology of English grammar should, there-

fore, be able to borrow most of the vocabulary of Latin grammar, such as "nominative," "genitive," "dative," etc.; (3) that the "rules" of sentence structure for English ought to parallel the rules for Latin syntax; and (4) that the grammar of any language conforms, or can be *made* to conform to, the rules of formal logic.

Linguists, and historical and descriptive grammarians, have subjected these assumptions to serious critical analysis in relatively recent years, and have found that the evidence either from the history of the English language or from studies of current English usage does not support them.

In 1929 the late Sterling Andrus Leonard, of the University of Wisconsin, published his searching study of the origins of most of our still prevailing notions about English grammar. (*The Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage, 1700-1800*.) He points out that there were conflicting views even in this century of the quest for correctness. There were those who looked to Latin as the model for English, those who sought to write their grammars in accord with formal logic, those who insisted upon holding to older, historical forms and "original" word meanings, and those who, following John Locke, insisted upon a view of correctness in accord with present-day linguists and descriptive grammarians; namely, that actual usage is the only valid criterion of "correctness." George Campbell's definition of good usage as "national, reputable, and present," in his *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* of 1776<sup>1</sup> sounds very much like the statements of contemporary linguists. Another good statement of this view was made by Noah Webster in his

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Edward L. Anderson is a member of the English department of Brooklyn College. His paper, although without the usual heading of that department, is our "Current English" this month.

<sup>1</sup> Cited by Sterling A. Leonard, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

1804 edition of the *Grammatical Institute*:<sup>3</sup> "When a Lowth, an Ash, and a Priestly differ from each other in opinion, the curious inquirer has no resource but to look for satisfaction in the state of the language itself, as it has been exhibited in the best writers and in general practice."<sup>4</sup> Leonard himself writes: "The rules of the eighteenth-century grammarians and purists and of their followers, we have noted, still appear in force in our school books and courses of study—literally thousands of proscriptions in school grammars, handbooks of correctness, lists of errors, and style-sheets are mere figments of the critical imagination. . . . Notable examples are the usual small, meaningless distinctions of parts of speech, which in real use are blind and almost without compartments, the false 'logical rules' of case and concord, and the absurd purisms in wording which are the staple of much English teaching."<sup>5</sup>

The scholarly studies of the history and grammar of the English language, which began to appear in the nineteenth century and have continued to be made in our own, have supplied very definite denials of the principal assumptions which we have just noted to be characteristic of the traditional grammars derived from the works of a relatively few eighteenth century British writers. These writers, it should be noted, were for the most part not scholars of language. They were in the words of Leonard, "gentlemen of leisure like Robert Baker, Esq., politicians out of favor like Horne Tooke, barristers and bishops and college dons unencumbered with exacting duties, and Scotchmen and Irishmen anxious for distinction, who in previous centuries would probably have disputed about the classics or theology, but now turned to their own language as a respectable and needy field for their endeavors."<sup>6</sup>

Let us examine these traditional as-

sumptions in the light of these more recent studies.

1. That the structure of English is basically akin to the structure of Latin, a highly inflected, regular, and consistent language. Old English, derived from the Germanic tongues of the original Anglo-Saxon invaders and of their later invading kinsmen, the Danes, was a highly inflected language. It had conjugational endings for the different numbers and persons of its verbs; declensional endings for the masculine, feminine, and neuter genders of both its nouns and adjectives; and distinct forms for its pronouns, still a characteristic of modern English. Even by Chaucer's time the bulk of these inflected forms had disappeared through the processes of time and "leveling." Chaucer is reasonably readable, with a little effort, for contemporary readers, while old English, much like its Germanic antecedents, requires the modern would-be reader to learn a language which is almost wholly foreign to him. By the time of Shakespeare and Elizabeth the English language had become, in its sentence structure or syntax, virtually the same as our modern English—a language with very few inflected forms left and with word-order as its primary device for expressing such grammatical ideas as case, modification, and subject-predicate relations.

Let us illustrate this by comparing a Latin sentence with its modern equivalent. In English we have "Boy loves girl." In Latin we have "Puer amat puellam." Since "puer" has a nominative case form and "puellam" an accusative (the nominative being "puella"), we can employ any possible word-order without altering the "grammar" of the Latin sentence, e.g., "Puellam amat puer"; "Amat puer puellam."

But let us see what happens when we try changing the word-order of "Boy loves girl." Modern English nouns have no endings to show whether they are subjects or objects. "Girl loves boy" switches the syntactical functions of the

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 245-247.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 232-233.

two nouns, and may express a very different meaning.

2. That the terminology of English grammar should be able to borrow most of the descriptive terms of Latin grammar. In Latin "porta villae" means "gate of city." "Villae" is the genitive case, singular, of "villa." The "ae" is a distinct case ending or inflection for the genitive case. Hence "genitive case" in Latin names an observable fact of the language. But in the English, "gate of the city," the noun, "city," has no change in form to show its "case." "Of the city" is said in many English grammars to be a "periphrastic genitive," but the same grammars will assert that "city" itself in this phrase is the object of the preposition "of" and hence in the "objective" or "accusative" case. If we use the term "case" for "city" in an English sentence, we are using it merely to describe a word-order position, and not a distinct word-form, with one exception. Note that in the following sentences many English grammars call "city" a different "case," though the word itself undergoes no change in form.

The city was dark.

The enemy attacked the city.

The gate of the city was open.

The king gave the city a reward.

The knight's reward was the city.

In "The city's gates were closed" we do have a distinct case form ('s), which is variously called in English grammars the "genitive" or "possessive" case.

The point to grasp here is simply that in Latin a "case" is a name for a distinct inflection or word-form, while in modern English, with one exception, *there are no cases for nouns at all*, in the Latin sense of case as distinct word-form.

3. That the "rules" of sentence structure or syntax for English ought to parallel the rules for Latin syntax. In Latin a preposition never occurs at the end of a sentence; it always precedes a noun in the accusative case, as in "Id portat ad villam" (He carries it to the city). The

eighteenth century grammar writers, having learned their Latin well, felt that it should be "bad English" to permit prepositions at the ends of English sentences. But there was no reason why this should be "forbidden" in English. Many English writers had placed prepositions at ends of sentences long before the latter half of the eighteenth century, and were doing so in this period. Leonard notes: "But the most striking circumstance in this array of censured constructions is that no mention whatever of the 'split infinitive' was discoverable, nor was the construction itself observed save once or twice in the authors read. Apparently, it was both a discovery and an aversion of nineteenth century grammarians."<sup>5</sup>

4. That "grammar"—whether that of Latin, French, Choctaw, English, or any other language—conforms, or can be *made* to conform, to the rules of formal logic. The yearning for order and predictability in a perplexing universe of physical forces and human affairs is one with which we can all sympathize. Unfortunately, however, Aristotle's classical logic was based on the assumption of a relatively static universe, a world of "things" or "entities" of rather fixed and settled natures, with "properties" or "qualities" which were distinct from the "things" they characterized. And the grammar of his own language which Aristotle wrote was a grammar based on his conception of the universe. The parent Indo-European language was a language developed by primitive men who made their language patterns fit the world as *they* perceived it—a world of things and qualities. These language ancestors of ours formulated the basic structure of our contemporary Romance and Germanic. And this basic structure is that of "subject-predicate" language.

In Aristotle's world—and we should never forget what that brief but wonderful age gave to us—phenomena were orderly, predictable, and classifiable. Phenomena of the natural world and of the

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

language of men, alike. Out of this long historical process has come our own quest for "logical" order and rule in our own English grammar. Unhappily, the human "mind" or "psycho-physiological organism" has never conformed to the "rules" of this static kind of logic. There doubtless is a logic of the human mind; and, little as we know of it, we do know that it is a logic of psychology and of human relations—and not the logic of "p<sub>q</sub>q," of "excluded middles," or of "syllogisms."

If we were logical in the old formal sense, we would have that sort of logical grammar in our modern English. Even a brief glance or two will suffice to show that we do not. Many conventional grammars assert that we should use the inflected genitive for persons or personified beings (Carl's hat, God's will, etc.) and the periphrastic or phrase genitive (the top of the car, the roof of the house, etc.) for inanimate things. Now consistency of operation is a prime requisite of formal logic. We ought, therefore, to suffer no

violation of this principle, yet "exceptions" to this "rule" are a common feature of modern English. We have such expressions as "a hair's breadth" and "a stone's throw." The desire for economy of form and for pleasantness of sound, psychological "logic," outweighs our obeisance to "logical" consistency in the traditional sense.

In informal Standard English "It is me" or "It's me" is a daily item of speech, being felt to be more natural and less stiff than "It is I." Perhaps the fact that the pronoun falls in the object territory of the sentence has strengthened the prevalence of this handy little phrase. But, to be logically consistent in the Aristotelian, and medieval sense, we should be equally willing—on the same informal level—to say "It is him," "It is them," "It is her." The fact is that most educated people are not. Again, the logic of language is a logic of the human mind, a phenomenon whose ways are simply not the ways of formal, scholastic logic.

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*John O'Hara Up to Now—[Continued from page 499]*

aestheticism itself. The sense of control which one recognizes while reading O'Hara's work does not result from the feeling that the author has created a unified whole; rather, the sureness of touch is a matter of practice, and, in intention, protective and deprivational. Beneath the formal structures lies that profound disaffection which none of the hardboiled writers are successful in disguising and which leads them towards their view of a divided man, a distracted humanity, and a disordered universe. O'Hara's stories are imbued with a sense of guilt, without any accompanying sense of sin, and this is the worst kind of guilt to endure, since it

makes guilt—and thus, the world—unaccountable and irresponsible. Consequently, O'Hara sees sometimes with contempt and perhaps even pity, but never with love and understanding. He invents indifference and amorality, but his books reveal mankind raw to the touch, asocial and apprehensive, estranged from his kind. O'Hara's books up to now have been shocking, sad, depressing, or desperately amusing; but they have not yet been serious, in the fullest sense of that adjective. Until he deepens his powers either of warm acceptance or of that savage indignation which implies love, his work is likely to remain what it has been in the past.

## News and Ideas

"THE MODERN AMERICAN Novel" is the subject of an adult educational television program being conducted this semester by William M. Schutte and Erwin R. Steinberg, members of the department of English, Carnegie Institute of Technology. Six regularly enrolled Carnegie students also participate in the discussion of such novels as *A Farewell to Arms*, *Babbitt*, *The Enormous Room*, *The Great Gatsby*, *You Can't Go Home Again*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Bear*, and *All the King's Men*.

THE FIFTEENTH ANNUAL Shakespeare Festival will be held in Ashland, Oregon, August 1-31. This year's plays offered in rotation will be *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Macbeth*, and *Henry VI, Part 3*. There will also be two performances of the rarely staged *Timon of Athens*, and concerts of Elizabethan music.

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN will offer its third annual *Workshop for College Professors* June 20-July 8. Features include presentations by a special workshop staff, discussions, and projects related to individual members' needs. This year, also, there will be a one-week *Institute on College Administration* immediately following the Workshop, July 11-15.

The Workshop and the Institute are directed by Algo D. Henderson, Professor of Higher Education, and he will have as assistants John E. Milholland, Assistant Professor of Psychology, and James M. Davis, Assistant Professor of Education. Other University faculty will be available as resource persons. Members of the special staff for the Workshop are Benjamin Bloom, University Examiner, University of Chicago; Elmer Ellis, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Missouri; and W. Hugh Stickler, Director,

Office of Educational Research and Service, The Florida State University. The University will also offer a six-weeks course on The College Teacher. The Summer Session begins June 20, and the Workshop meetings are scheduled so as to give members opportunity to attend regular Summer Session classes if they wish to do so.

THE HUMANITIES—THAT IS, LITERATURE, languages, philosophy, music, and other fine arts are elected by too few college students, President Nathan M. Pusey, of Harvard warns; instead they flock to sciences and the social studies. He says: "A college in which the Humanities are weak runs the risk of being less liberal than it should; for our full humanity is best quickened and developed through imaginative grasp of the subtler experiences of individuals as revealed through the arts and letters. The chief aim of undergraduate education is to discover what it means to be a man."

THE AMERICAN SHAKESPEARE Festival Theatre, announced in our February issue, is expected to be completed and in operation with a full program of Shakespeare plays this summer! It is under construction in a twelve-acre park at Stratford, Connecticut, half way between Bridgeport and New Haven. Not all the money needed had been contributed when this note was written. Teachers interested in giving or soliciting funds or in publicizing the performances may get full information from the chairman of the National Educators for the American Shakespeare Festival Theatre, Hardy R. Finch, P. O. Box 124, Greenwich, Connecticut.

NO ONE BEST METHOD OF teaching has been found, psychologist Irving Lorge asserts in his *Teachers Col-*

*lege Record* article "If They Know Not, Teach." Attempts to measure the effectiveness of lecture, discussion, recitation, etc. have rated each of them as best and worst. Because students, teachers, matter to be learned, and the occasion all vary, and especially because any uniform procedure becomes monotonous, all should be used according to circumstances. "Variety in method is the spice of teaching."

THE DELIBERATIONS OF THE six work shops of the Second Annual Kansas University Conference on Composition and Literature in High School and College are reported in the winter issue of the *University of Kansas Bulletin of Education*. Each workshop had two sessions, and did a good job of exploration. The topics were reading student papers, maintaining standards, grammar, the choice of literature for high school, convincing students of the value of literature, and preparation for college English. Oscar M. Haugh will send NCTE members free copies of the bulletin—while the supply lasts.

THE POETIC THEORY WHICH has recently been dominant in America is set forth by Archibald MacLeish in "The Proper Pose of Poetry," contributed to the *Saturday Review* of March 5. Perhaps we should say a basal principle of poetic theory, for he makes just one point in the three and a half pages. This is the idea of reconciliation of opposites or of conflicting elements.

"SOME PREJUDICES ABOUT Teaching" is the disarming title of H. W. Davis's swan song after forty years of teaching at Kansas State College, contributed to the February *Bulletin of the Kansas Association of Teachers of English*. From more than forty years of

teaching college English composition and literature he has concluded (1) that sharpening students' attention to the targets of their sentences, paragraphs, and whole compositions is more helpful than decorating the pages with symbols of errors in mechanics—if the instructor insists that they study the chapters of their texts dealing with the mechanics; and (2) that "literature is nothing other than good reporting . . . of lives lived and reflected upon, situations encountered, convictions formed, and emotions experienced," and that American literature can well be emphasized.

"THE RETURN OF D. H. LAWRENCE," by Harry T. Moore in the March 12 *Saturday Review* heralds a Lawrence revival—or discovery. During his life his work was condemned as anti-intellectual, angry, indecent. Moore cites works which he thinks show that Lawrence was skillful in discussing ideas; that his tantrums were transient and oral, and did not enter into his writing; that his sexual frankness was not pornography but an attempt to see all of life in perspective. Some of his novels had enough protest against industrial conditions to lead conservative authorities to ban them on the charge of indecency. So he was attacked while he lived, then neglected, and is only now coming to be justly appreciated.

SHOULD THE PREDICATE VERB of a subject "what"-clause be singular or plural? Francis Christensen explores this question at length in the February *American Speech*, and comes to the following conclusions: If the "what" which is the subject of the subject clause is clearly plural, the verb of the main clause is plural. When the main verb is followed by a simple plural predicate nominative, that verb is plural regardless of the subject clause.

## Councilletter

Since we met in Detroit, there have been a number of developments in Council work, only a few of which I can describe here.

Numerically we continue to grow. At the peak month of this year, circulation figures showed more than 14,000 members and 16,000 subscribers, making a total of 30,000—an all-time high. Particularly significant for the future of the Council is the growing interest in junior memberships. After offering such memberships for only 6 years and with no high-pressure campaigning, we now have 1410 junior members on the roll. The development of junior affiliates in the colleges and universities should increase this number many times, especially if an amendment is adopted in New York that would permit us to drop the minimum membership of a junior affiliate from 25 to 10.

The services of the Council continue to grow also. If you have been watching the journals and reading the leaflets that come from the Council office, you know that the Council is now offering more books and records at reduced prices to members than ever before. To make easy reference possible, portfolios containing reprints of some of the most significant articles to appear in *Elementary English* and *The English Journal* are now being prepared. The Council is also undertaking to distribute or to help you obtain literary maps and other materials prepared by affiliates. Of the new publications issued by the Council itself, the most important this year will undoubtedly be the high school volume in the Curriculum series. It is now scheduled for appearance late in the fall.

Another development is that we have been expanding our contacts with organizations and institutions which have related interests. At the present time we are engaging in joint projects with such bodies as the Modern Language Association, the College English Association, the

Speech Association of America, the American Library Association, the National Council of Social Science Teachers, the American Book Publishers' Council, and publishers of paperbound books. This summer the Council will co-sponsor workshops and conferences with the United Nations, the New York Council of Teachers of English, Appalachian State Teachers College, Hunter College, the State University of Iowa, Kansas City University, the University of Puerto Rico, and possibly one or two others.

One change in personnel must be reported—a change that brings an end to a long and splendid era for two of the Council magazines. Last January, Wilbur Hatfield asked that he be relieved of the editorships of *College English* and *The English Journal* on July 31 of this year. With considerable regret the Executive Committee acceded to his request. All members of the Council—and of the profession—owe more to Wilbur Hatfield and to LaTourette Stockwell, who has been Associate Editor of *College English*, than can possibly be put into words here. Fortunately, we have been able to obtain the services of two worthy successors. Beginning August 1, Dwight L. Burton of Florida State University will edit *The English Journal*, and Frederick L. Gwynn of Pennsylvania State University will edit *College English*.

Possibly the most important single development of the year thus far is one mentioned by Vice-President Cook in her Councilletter last month: the steps now being taken by the Executive Committee to make the Council not only a service organization for all its members but also an increasingly effective spokesman for the profession as a whole. To this end the Executive Committee has already taken the following steps: it has scheduled for both its fall and midwinter meetings at least a half-day of discussion on the basic problems of the profession; to these dis-

cussions will be invited the editors of the Council magazines and outsiders who are in the position to give the profession valuable assistance with its problems. The Committee has charged the first Vice-President with the responsibility of studying and reporting trends that have implications for the welfare of English teachers. It has also delegated the President to solicit suggestions from all of the members so that individual problems are not lost sight of. Such a request went out last January, and the replies have been both numerous and helpful. Finally the Committee hopes to encourage articles in magazines and newspapers that will correct some of the popular misconceptions of the English teacher and his job, and to make clear what the responsibilities and difficulties of the English teacher are. All of this implies a major shift in the functions of the Executive Committee from detail work to large scale thinking and planning. By such a shift the Committee hopes that ultimately its work will be reflected in a higher and more secure status for the profession as a whole.

This coming November we meet in New

York at the Commodore and Roosevelt hotels. To help you take advantage of New York's unique opportunities, we are planning to change the usual convention program somewhat. To leave Thanksgiving afternoon free for theater-going, the Directors' Meeting and the Business Meeting will be squeezed into the morning hours. On Friday afternoon, instead of the usual discussion meetings, Vice-President Russell is scheduling trips to the United Nations, to galleries, museums, TV studios, and other places of interest. For those who prefer to stay indoors there will be talks by writers, publishers, and persons associated with radio and TV. Despite these changes, the Convention will as always concern itself substantially with the persisting problems with which the profession must constantly contend. It should be an exciting and helpful program. It's not too early to make plans now to attend. Incidentally, if you are a real, long-range planner, you will want to know that we go to St. Louis in 1956, Denver in 1957, and Minneapolis in 1958.

JOHN C. GERBER, *President*

### NCTE Election Notice

In accordance with the constitution of the National Council of Teachers of English, the Board of Directors at its meeting last Thanksgiving Day chose Harlen M. Adams, Blanche Trezvant, John J. DeBoer, Marion C. Sheridan, and Robert C. Pooley as a Nominating Committee to propose officers for 1956. Through Harlen Adams, the chairman, the committee offers these nominations:

*For President:* Luella B. Cook, Minneapolis Public Schools

*For First Vice-President:* Helen Mackintosh, United States Office of Education

*For Second Vice-President:* Jerome Archer, Marquette University

*For Directors-at-Large:* Richard Corbin, Peekskill, New York, High School;

Dorothea Fry, John Muir High School, Pasadena, California; Alfred Grommon, Stanford University; W. Wilbur Hatfield 10631 Seeley Avenue, Chicago 43; Oscar M. Haugh, University of Kansas; Isabel Lund, Box 761, Houma, Louisiana.

This slate will be presented for action at the meeting of the Board next November. Other nomination(s) may be made by petition(s) signed by twenty Directors of the Council and presented to the Secretary of the Council, with the written consent of the nominee(s), before August 16. The election will occur during the Thanksgiving session of the Board. Additional nominations may be made at that time by any member of the Board.

# New Books

## Nonfiction

HIS VERY SELF AND VOICE. Collected Conversations of Lord Byron. *Edited by Ernest J. Lovell, Jr.* Pp. 675. \$7.50.

Byron contrived to make himself a legendary figure even while still alive, with the result that anyone who came within his aura seems to have hastened to report it. Lovell has collected into a hefty volume the accounts of 150 of Byron's contemporaries who conversed with him, and has arranged these chronologically with a clarifying introduction and footnotes. The effect is to give the reader the feeling of having met personally a brilliant conversationalist who was part devil, part angel, and "mad as the wind."

WYNDHAM LEWIS. *By Hugh Kenner.* New Directions. Pp. 169. \$2.50.

A brief but adequate critical survey of the major writings of the artist, philosopher (*Time and the Western Man*), and satirical novelist (*Tarr, The Apes of God, Chiltern-mass*), who was the friend of Joyce and has had an astringent influence on English letters without being nearly so well known. Kenner's book has the freshness of a young writer rediscovering a neglected genius, which Lewis undoubtedly is.

THACKERAY THE NOVELIST. *By Geoffrey Tillotson.* Cambridge University Press. Pp. 312. \$4.00.

Thackeray still has many readers today, judging by the library circulation of his books, but the readers aren't the critics, who have concerned themselves chiefly with his biography and personality. Tillotson focuses his critical attention upon the novels, showing their relationship to each other and to Thackeray's other writings. He believes that they must be regarded as part of a large creative experience and not just as individual works, and shows that the oneness of Thackeray's writing consists of a geographical and "dynastic" unity "a tract of space, genealogy, and time stretching from the reign of James II to the middle of the nineteenth century and embracing England,

Paris, Baden Baden, and North America." Thus regarded, Thackeray's plots have continuity although they lack formal design. The kind of criticism which sends one back to the novels.

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE MODERN NOVEL: Perspectives in Criticism. *By Robert Humphrey.* University of California Press. Pp. 127. \$2.75.

This is a useful book despite its involute style and the fact that it is more limited in scope than the title implies. The emphasis is on the stylistic devices and symbolic patterns by which thought on the pre-speech level may be indicated and especially as they are used by Joyce, Woolf, Faulkner and Dorothy Richardson.

LETTERS OF JOHN KEATS. *Selected by Frederick Page.* Oxford. Pp. 460. \$2.25.

Contains the larger part of Keats's letters; text is that of Maurice Forman's edition; a double volume in the pocket-sized "World's Classics" series. A treasure for the price!

YEARBOOK OF ENGLISH FESTIVALS. *By Dorothy Gladys Spicer.* H. W. Wilson Company. Pp. 298. \$5.00.

The festivals are arranged chronologically according to holiday seasons, and Miss Spicer records where each is observed today as well as their origin and ancient history. Included is a full-page county map of England, a glossary of festival terms, and a list of books for further reading. Fascinating.

THE ANNOTATOR. *By Alan Keen and Roger Lubbock.* Macmillan. Pp. 216. \$4.00.

Keen, an English antiquarian bookseller, acquired an old folio volume of Halle's *Chronicle* with handwritten marginal notes. Experts determined the handwriting as sixteenth century. In tracing the original owner the authors stumbled upon evidence which indicates that Shakespeare may have spent his "hidden years" (1585-1592) in the household of a wealthy Lancashire family

of Catholic sympathies, where he *may* have been placed by his Catholic recusant father instead of at the Protestant Stratford grammar school, and where he *could* have had access to this particular folio of Halle's *Chronicle*. We know Shakespeare used the *Chronicle* as source material for his historical plays. The authors hypothesize that the marginalia are in his hand, but the evidence presented is inconclusive.

**COURTSHIP IN SHAKESPEARE.** By William G. Meader. King's Crown Press. Pp. 266. \$4.00.

Meader begins by defining the varieties of courtly love formalized at the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine, then traces their development in literature and society to the sixteenth century when, contrary to previous opinion, they did not die out with the advent of romanticism. The major portion of the study is concerned with the relationship of the love plots of Shakespeare's plays to this tradition, seen, for example, in the mock marriage between Rosalind and Orlando, the discovery of the handkerchief in Othello, and Ophelia's return to Hamlet of his betrothal gift.

**HAWTHORNE: A CRITICAL STUDY.** By Hyatt H. Waggoner. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Pp. 268. \$4.75.

Hawthorne's "works initiate and define the great tradition in American fiction" later cultivated by Melville, James, and Faulkner. Unlike the "realists" from Defoe to Dickens, he thought of the novel as art rather than propaganda or entertainment. He wished to present "truth of the human heart," because the human heart is the most significant thing in the world. In his early productive years, by "passive sensibility" he burrowed deep into the dark caverns of the human heart. Later, better adjusted and more sophisticated, he doubted his values and could not write—until the last few months. The changing intellectual climate of our day promises renewed popularity for Hawthorne.

**THE SOLITARY SINGER: A Critical Biography of Walt Whitman.** By Gay Wilson Allen. Macmillan. Pp. 616. \$8.00.

Whitman enthusiasts who are not pressed

for time will enjoy all of this thick volume. It not only recounts all of Whitman's known experience which is pertinent to an understanding of his poems, but also paints many backgrounds in detail. The criticism is, however, often simply textual explication, with evaluation. A scholar's book for scholars.

**AMERICA'S MUSIC.** From the Pilgrim's [music] to the Present. By Gilbert Chase. McGraw-Hill. Pp. 773. \$8.50.

An important, fascinating study of one portion of our cultural heritage; *not* a conventional history. Chase defines "America's music" as that "made or continuously used by the people of the United States," and he describes, illuminates, and evaluates the vital processes and factors which have gone into its making. He also upsets numerous popular misconceptions. For example, he gives evidence that the Puritan psalm singers were not dreary fanatics but jolly souls who *enjoyed* music. Since America's musical past has been a formative period, Chase's main emphasis is upon folk and popular idiom. The picture he presents is of a sturdy American musical vernacular marching steadily through three centuries until now even our academic composers are catching up with it, or being caught up by it.

**WHY JOHNNY CAN'T READ AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT.** By Rudolf Flesch. Harper. Pp. 222. \$3.00.

Flesch concludes from his limited investigation that most schools do not teach phonics. This is unlikely, since all reading experts call phonics necessary. Flesch recommends teaching letter sounds before any words, which tends to slow reading and mere word reading. His imperfect phonics exercises may be helpful to any pupils above the fourth grade who have somehow missed phonics.

**PAPERBOUND BOOKS IN PRINT.** R. R. Bowker Company, 62 West 45th Street, New York 26. \$1.00; \$4.00 per year.

The first issue was promised for April, and there will be revised editions every three months. It covers about 4000 titles of 22 publishers. It includes nothing selling for more than \$0.95.

## Poetry, Fiction

MID-CENTURY FRENCH POETS. *Selected and Edited by Wallace Fowlie.* Twayne Publishers. Pp. 273. \$4.50.

A selection of contemporary French verse in a bilingual edition. Ten poets are represented: Max Jacob, Leon-Paul Fargue, Jules Supervielle, St. John Perse, Jean Cocteau, Andre Breton, Paul Eluard, Robert Desnos, Henri Michaux, and Pierre Emmanuel. Fowlie provides an excellent general introduction in which he shows these poets to be fully conscious of their heritage from Baudelaire and Mallarmé and their poems to be deeply rooted in symbolism. He also contributes a critical appreciation and bibliography of each individual poet. A useful introductory volume.

POEMS 1923-1954. *e.e. cummings.* Harcourt Brace. Pp. 468. \$6.75.

A definitive volume, drawn from the contents of ten previous volumes, containing in all 598 poems, the life work of a noted American poet. Here the poetry lover may read and interpret for himself the elliptical comments of a hardy experimentalist. For years this reviewer has been alternately delighted and exasperated by them, but never bored. The accumulative effect of the collection is to induce the traditional prayer for the elucidation of spiritual mysteries, "dear Lord, may these truths be made apparent to me."

THE SCARECROW CHRIST AND OTHER POEMS. *By Elder Olson.* Noon-day Press. Pp. 83. \$3.00.

Nearly half this volume consists of poems selected from Olson's earlier *Thing of Sorrow* and *Cock of Heaven*. The new poems are contemplative rather than impassioned. Some are semi-allegorical, like the "Ballad of the Scarecrow Christ," "Crucifix," one of the most vivid pictures of the agony of the Cross, ends in peaceful affirmation. The verse is almost free, with rhymes irregularly placed or omitted and rhythms often interrupted.

THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES. *By W. H. Auden.* Random. Pp. 84. \$3.00.

Three groups of poems: "Bucolics," "In Sunshine and Shade" (including the title poem), and "Horae Canonicae." Slightly

melancholy, coolly reflective, sometimes satiric, rarely gayly affirmative. Smooth and various in rhythm, often irregular in use of rhyme. Readable, pleasing, but not permanently memorable.

COLLECTED POEMS. Revised and enlarged edition. *By James Stephens.* Macmillan. \$5.00.

Before he died in 1950, Stephens carefully reviewed his entire poetic output, and the changes he made are incorporated into this edition, which includes nine previously unpublished poems as well as all the poems from *Strict Joy, Kings and the Moon*, and the 1926 edition of his *Collected Poems*. His is the voice of the song sparrow whose cheering lyric note pierces the fog of a troubled world.

BORESTONE MOUNTAIN POETRY AWARDS, 1954: A Compilation of Original Poetry Published in the Magazines of the English-speaking World in 1953. *Edited by Robert T. Moore.* Stanford University Press. Pp. 105. \$3.00.

These awards, founded on Borestone Mountain, Maine, in 1946, have hitherto been called only Poetry Awards. They are \$300, \$200, and \$100 for "best" poems in English published in magazines, \$1,250 for an unpublished book-length collection, and \$100 for the best published undergraduate poem. R. P. T. Coffin, Elizabeth Coatsworth, and Laurie Lee got the main awards, and Allen Tate (not entered in the competition) a special \$300 award. Leah Bodine Drake submitted the winning collection. Australian students captured first and third in their division. *Almost wholly American*, in spite of title.

COROMANDEL. *By John Masters.* Viking. \$3.95.

By the author of *Nightrunners of Bengal*, who represents the fifth generation of his family to serve in India. The hero of the story bought an old map (1627) from a poacher, and found an old book about buried treasure. He dreamed of riches to be found at Coromandel as shown on the map. By ship, by walking across icy mountains and jungle wastelands, he made his way to the

Meru of his map. He found that "the magic mountain is always over the horizon," but he learned that man may both "dream and do." April Literary Guild selection.

**FLAMINGO FEATHER.** By *Laurens van der Post*. Morrow. \$3.95.

The hero, Pierré, a cultured South African of Dutch descent, tells the story. One stormy evening he heard a war cry, "At last we kill," and hurrying after the killers he found a native dying, in his hand a little flamingo feather, emblem of a secret society. Later it is discovered that the Russians are encouraging the African natives in a fierce uprising; terror, suspense, and superstition rule the land. Through it all runs the courage and desperate hope of the black man, the charm and beauty of Africa. Africa's people seem very real. The author is genuinely concerned about the future of the natives and *their* Africa.

**THE HOUND OF EARTH.** By *Vance Bourjaily*. Scribner. \$3.50.

Allerd Pennington, a scientist, had worked on the production of the atomic bomb without realizing its purpose. Shocked when he learned of the explosion over Hiroshima, he deserted the army *and his family*. Later he worked during the Xmas rush in the toy department of a large store, where the characters were a bizarre group. Bourjaily does not integrate clearly the atomic problem and the decadence of the store clerks or Pennington's emotional problems.

*Shakespeare in Action*—[Continued from page 492]

by the weakness of the central figure, *Henry VI*.

Thus Shakespeare in action turned out to be as rewarding as Professor Bailey's essay had promised, for the Festival performances were not only exciting but instructive. They also revealed that in her role of academic advisor to the Festival Professor Bailey did not always practice what she preaches, for the excessive historical accuracy which marked the productions was in fact a return to the ways of those preoccupied academics whom she so takes to task in her essay. But historical zeal, it is apparent, is no sub-

**THE BRIDE OF INNISFALLEN.** By *Eudora Welty*. Harcourt. \$3.50.

Seven short stories by the author of *The Ponder Heart*, *A Curtain of Green*, and *Delta Wedding*. Some of these stories are of characters and scenes of her own South—particularly New Orleans. One is of Italian-Americans on shipboard. The title story is of a journey from London to Cork. All are witty, original in theme and human experience; often satiric.

**THE MOON TO PLAY WITH.** By *John Wiles*. John Day. \$3.50.

The author has made his home in South Africa where he has followed closely the tragedy of the black people, particularly the young boys, who try to learn the white man's ways. Pinto, twelfth son of a native village woman, walks to the coastal city of Durban, secures work and makes friends with both white and black boys. He means so well! Yet tragedy strikes. A moving story that grows quite lyrical. Civilization!

**THE HIDDEN RIVER.** By *Storm Jameson*. Harper. \$3.00.

The time is 1949, the place northern France. In the manor house the clan of the Monneries live. The parents are dead but there are an aunt, an uncle and various cousins. The war is over but not forgotten. Robert had been captured and tortured by the Germans. There are two murders, a traitor, a love story. But most important is the psychological study of people under the stress of modern life, national conflicts, war and its aftermath.

stitute for sensitive and meaningful direction. Therefore the approach to be followed by future producers seems clear—present Shakespeare's plays on the stage for which they were written, but present them with an awareness that each play is a distinct and different problem not to be solved by any single, unimaginatively applied theory of staging. Archeological curiosities are poor substitutes for significant productions. Once this fact is fully grasped, we may be on the verge of establishing a truly great Shakespearean tradition in the American theatre.

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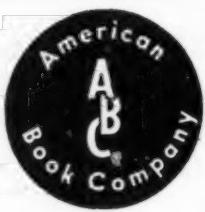
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